Internalised landscapes. The vessel form in sculptural response to place.

by
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Acknowledgements

Moving to Tasmania from Victoria to undertake postgraduate study could only have been achieved with the support, guidance and great humour of my family, Mum, Dad and James, my friends and my partner Tonya.
Undertaking a full-time research degree in Hobart meant leaving the security of full-time work in Melbourne to embrace the unknown, away from family and old friends on the mainland.

Despite the increased distance and challenges to catch up in person, family support for this move could not have been stronger, and it has made for a constant reminder of just how fortunate I have been to find myself in such a supportive and loving family.

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Phillip Blacklow, Stuart Houghton and Murray Antill, in particular, have been an unwavering source of knowledge and assistance in helping my studio work come to life – put simply, without their help and guidance, it would not have.

In a time when digital processes are being looked to in creative practice for their mechanised efficiencies and laser-precision, Phil, Stuart and Murray have simultaneously understood their benefits, while providing the invaluable hand-making skills and techniques which serve to ground and bed artistic works in the human experience. For their ongoing help, I count myself incredibly lucky. I would also like to thank craftsman Damien Wright for his very generous offering of time and feedback during the application process for this research, as well as Jacqueline Fox for her bright and fastidious editorial assistance in the latter stages of the project.

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Preface and Acknowledgement of Country:

As a new resident to Hobart and Tasmania, I would like to acknowledge the Australian Aboriginal peoples of this nation. In undertaking research in such a profoundly beautiful and culturally rich place, I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which we are located and the place where I have truly valued investing time travelling, walking and making.

I would also like to pay my respects to ancestors and Elders, past and present.
As both a student of the University of Tasmania and more recently as a resident of Tasmania, I am committed to honouring Australian Aboriginal peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to the land, waters and seas and their rich contribution to society.

Internalised landscapes. The vessel form in sculptural response to place.

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The Vessel Form in Sculptural Response to Place.

Abstract:

My research project addresses the question: "How might the vessel form serve as a sculptural device for reflection on the sense of reverence and mystery experienced in Tasmanian landscapes?" In doing so, it considers how a phenomenological understanding of embodied spatial experience and the integration of traces of the landscape can underpin and inform the sculptural translation of a personal response in the larger, "macro-scale" environment, to a much more intimate and private "micro-scale" environment. As a studio-based investigation, my research undertakes the creation of vessel forms to embody the sense of mystery, awe and reverence experienced in four selected Tasmanian landscapes – Mt Lyell, Fortescue Bay, Canoe Bay and Cape Hauy. The vessel form is defined in this project as both a container and a conduit for responses to place, with the landscape sites selected for this investigation all, in their own way, having elicited a powerful personal response.

The conceptual framework underpinning this investigation is derived primarily from phenomenological theorists of architectural space - in particular, Juhani Pallasmaa, Peter Zumthor and Steven Holl, who advocate for the design of spaces which take into account all of the body's senses. The writings of these architects provide a deepened understanding of parameters, such as materiality, time, light, shadow and scale, which has been crucial in the development of my studio-based practice. More broadly, phenomenological conceptualisations of place by theorists such as Yi-Fu Tuan, Gaston Bachelard, and Jeff Malpas have been important for articulating the nature of the experience of place that I seek to evoke in the vessel forms. The

writings of Susan Stewart and Jacques Derrida establish a framework for understanding the way in which the souvenir, or collected traces of landscape, can serve to embody our experiences. The psychological power and necessity of secret places are then highlighted by the writings of Gaston Bachelard and Christopher Alexander, Sara Ishikawa and Murray Silverstein.

Particularly influential figures for my work include artists Robert Rauschenberg, Joseph Cornell and Donald Judd, craftsman Damien Wright and architect Peter Zumthor. All of these artists work with the vessel form, imbuing small spaces with their own sense of aura, and in some cases integrating found objects. Wright's work considers the meaning in materiality and Zumthor's architectural approach exemplifies a phenomenological understanding of embodied spatial experience.

By way of final studio outcomes for the research, a series of nine sculptural vessel forms has emerged which provides a range of different approaches to "containment, concealment and revelation". Material contrasts reference a sense of tension between timescales in the selected landscapes. Contrasting light and shadow brings both clarity and obscurity of depth. An intimate scale invites closer inspection, while allowing personal reflection upon the enigmatic nature of the wider Tasmanian environment.

The collected traces of landscape could be interpreted here as charmed relics, each prompting in their own way a sense of wonder, mystery and fascination. Enabled by the vessel form, these intricately detailed traces are revered for their fundamental connection to both time and place.

Internalised Landscapes. The Vessel Form in Sculptural Response to Place.

Introduction

Project Context and Framework

As a studio-based investigation, my research undertakes the creation of sculptural vessel forms in response to the sense of mystery, awe and reverence experienced in four selected Tasmanian landscapes – Mt Lyell, Fortescue Bay, Canoe Bay and Cape Hauy. The landscape sites which have been selected for this investigation have all, in their own way, elicited a strong personal emotional response upon first encountering them.

The common theme underpinning the responses to these landscapes is the way in which a phenomenological understanding of embodied spatial experience at an architectural scale – a scale inherently larger than the human body – is embraced in order to translate the mystery, awe and reverence experienced in the selected "macro-scale" landscapes into a much smaller experiential "micro-scale" through the vessel form as the medium of sculptural expression.

Through the lens of a phenomenological approach inspired by the writings of Juhani Pallasmaa, Peter Zumthor and Steven Holl, who advocate for the design of spaces which take into account all of the body's senses, I consider what is it about an environment that moves us and how a sense of atmosphere or mystery might be brought to a space.

Sculptural responses to the sense of awe and wonder experienced in the landscape might suggest that this investigation forms part of the philosophical enquiry into the notion of 'the sublime.'

In his book compiling various authors' definitions of the concept, Simon Morley considers 'the sublime' as it was first applied in 18th Century arts "to describe aspects of nature that incited awe and wonder, such as mountains, avalanches, waterfalls, stormy seas or the infinite vault of the starry sky" (Morley 2010, p. 12). The perspective of the Irish political theorist and philosopher Edmund Burke is also considered for its psychological view of the sublime as being based upon a person's

underlying sense of fear when confronted with astonishment in nature, suggesting that "terror is … either more openly or latently, the ruling principle of the sublime" (Burke 1757, p. 106). The German philosopher Immanuel Kant too presents an interpretation of the theme, suggesting that the sublime is in essence 'a negative experience of limits' or as Morely puts it, "a way of talking about what happens when we are faced with something we do not have the capacity to understand or control – something excessive." (Morley 2010, p. 16).

While the research may touch upon certain aspects of the overarching concept of 'the sublime' including the awe and wonder experienced in the selected landscapes, this project does not deal with the philosophical and psychoanalytic aspects inherent to Kant and Burke's understanding and enquiry of the sublime experience.

Instead, my research more broadly investigates how a phenomenological understanding of embodied spatial experience can be embraced in order to translate a personal response to the larger, macro-scale environment, into a much more intimate and private micro-scale environment. In turn, my primary research question asks, **how might the vessel form act as a sculptural device for reflection on the sense of reverence and mystery experienced in Tasmanian landscapes?**

By employing an understanding of phenomenology as it relates to the embodied experience of architectural space, while sculpturally responding to environments using the vessel form and integrated traces of the landscape, this studio-based research provides a deepened understanding of the ability for spatial encounters to be translated and experienced across scales from the macro (exterior environment) to the micro (interior environment), while adding to the body of knowledge surrounding inter-disciplinary practice between fine arts and design.

As a studio-based investigation with a defined focus and timeframe, the breadth of material that could be covered in depth was naturally limited. With its focus to respond in a very personal way to the sense of reverence and mystery experienced in the selected landscapes through the lens of phenomenology, a devoted historical account of colonial and indigenous histories in the landscape did not form a core theme of the research. Given however the nature of the project as a sculptural

response to place, prior knowledge of the extended history during which indigenous Tasmanian (palawa) people inhabited, shaped and acted as custodians of the island could not be ignored.

Walking these landscapes today as a non-indigenous person and as a new resident in Tasmania, it has been difficult not to imagine how palawa people would have inhabited and thrived in the landscape prior to Europeans' first contact and colonisation. Despite the proud continuation of the palawa culture in Tasmania today, reflection on the brutal disruption to their people, culture and language in the early 1800's brings with it an undercurrent of sadness and regret for the losses experienced to such a rich, complex and enduring culture.

An in-depth historical review of palawa culture and its relationship to place in Tasmania has not formed a key theme of this investigation given limited time and a concern for the need to do such important research justice. This project has however highlighted that further investigations into pre-colonial palawa ontologies contributing to a sense of place would serve to provide a deepened contextual understanding of the selected landscapes while offering a valuable alternative perspective from which to consider the notion of 'place'. In addition to this deepened contextual understanding, the research would offer a valuable historical and cultural lens through which to sculpturally respond to the sense of mystery and reverence experienced in the landscape.

While the selected landscapes for this research have been referred to by their contemporary English names, prior to British Colonisation in 1803, these landscapes had for some 40,000 years (Ryan 2012, p. 41) been the home to the palawa people of Tasmania (Trouwwunna) and would have held their own indigenous names.
As noted by the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, place names "formed complex interlinked networks in which places, their names and attributes, reflected the relationship between the people and the land. The names were not arbitrary but integral to the places to which they were attached, and derived from the activities of ancestral beings who formed the landscape as they moved through it."(palawa kani Language Program 2017, p. 3) Adding to the complexity of this referencing system, "the meaning of many Aboriginal names can only be understood through their

connection to other names and places. They also describe the land physically and identify its resources. Therefore many words translated by recorders as the "name" for a specific place are also the same words as those for geographical features or their characteristics, or can include parts of those other words."(palawa kani Language Program 2017, p. 3)

Lyndall Ryan also notes in her book *Tasmanian Aborigines, A history since 1803*, that the palawa held very complex spiritual beliefs and practices, whereby "their cosmologies involved the intertwining of landscape, ritual, music, art and law so that none formed a truly separate domain."(Ryan 2012, p. 7) With this the case, following British Colonisation and the ensuing disruption of the indigenous peoples' society, culture and language, very few aboriginal place names were successfully or accurately recorded. The Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre notes that "most of that knowledge behind the names of places has tragically been lost. While we are able to retrieve the sounds of the names and re-establish their connection to the places they refer to, we cannot today decipher the original 'meaning' of many of our words for places."(palawa kani Language Program 2017, p. 3)

Unfortunately - and in the case of Fortescue Bay, Cape Hauy, Canoe Bay and Mt Lyell - dual, indigenous place names have not yet emerged in published research. Despite the best efforts of UTAS research librarians and the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre Language department, suitably accurate indigenous place names for these specific locations are as yet to be established from primary sources. This said, the research into dual naming of locations in Tasmania is ongoing and much knowledge regarding the daily lives, customs and traditions of Tasmanian Aborigines has been successfully researched and recorded.

Located on the Tasman Peninsula, Fortescue Bay, Cape Hauy and Canoe Bay all fall within what is known as the Oyster Bay nation of the palawa people. Estimated to have been the largest of the nine Tasmanian nations prior to colonisation, the Oyster Bay nation was comprised of ten clans, with estimates numbering at least 700-800 people (Ryan 1996, p. 17). Within the Oyster Bay nation, the landscapes of Fortescue Bay, Cape Hauy and Canoe Bay were inhabited by the Pydairrerme Clan (Ryan 2012, p. 13). Other than for occasional summer visits or for major ceremonial occasions in

Big River country on the Great Western Tiers, the Pydairrerme may not have needed to travel west every spring and summer (like other clans of the nation), instead, "using their watercraft to forage within their own rich resource areas all year round."(Ryan 2012, p. 18)

Unlike the coastal landscapes of the Tasman Peninsula in the South East, Mt Lyell is located in the West Coast Range of Tasmania towards the southern end of what is known as the North West nation. Considered as one of the largest nations in Trouwunna and estimated to have had a population of between 400 and 600 people, the North West nation supported at least eight clans (Ryan 2012, p. 34) which moved seasonally up and down the coast between erected beehive-shaped huts in strategic locations close to foraging areas(Ryan 2012, p. 36). While limited information can be found about palawa movements through the Mt Lyell region specifically, the nearest of the eight tribal groups to the area would appear to have been the Peternidic clan, located at the mouth of the Pieman River (Ryan 2012, p. 34).

While it has not been possible to source indigenous place names for the selected landscapes in this study, it is acknowledged that the process of retrieving both palawa language and place names is ongoing and that dual naming of locations would serve to rightfully acknowledge the extended history and culture of aboriginal custodianship of the land in Tasmania.

Why are the selected landscapes significant?

Mt Lyell:

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

At a height of 917 m above sea level and located to the North of Gormanston along the West Coast Range of Tasmania, Mt Lyell has long been associated with the Mt Lyell Mining Company and the highly productive Copper and Silver mines to its West.

When I first drove past this mountain some ten years ago on my first trip to Tasmania, it signalled the beginning of an intensely mysterious and confronting series of landscapes between the mining towns of Gormanston and Queenstown which highlighted the extent to which human habitation and mining processes in the area had stripped the surface of the land.

By firstly "sluicing" the slopes in the area in their search for alluvial gold, the surface gravel, soil and button grass of the area had been removed many years earlier by mining processes, exposing a wealth of igneous pyrite bedrocks high in sulphur. In a confronting display, the sulphur-rich bedrock then oxidises when it rains, leaching out metal sulphides and acid runoff(Galvin 2016).

The result of this human agency is a landscape powerful with imagery of an '"other" and foreboding place; reddened, denuded and scarred. While there were many strong memories from my first visit to Tasmania of lush temperate rainforests in the Tarkine and wild wind-beaten coastlines along the West coast, before undertaking my first formal field trips for this research, it was this powerful memory of an otherworldly landscape which I first needed to respond to.

Fortescue Bay:

Fig.3

Fig.4

In direct comparison to this human-scarred landscape, Fortescue Bay was selected as a place of relative purity, displaying only limited evidence of human agency within the environment.

Located some 18 km South East of Port Arthur and accessed via 12 km of gravel road, the process of arriving in Fortescue Bay is one steeped in a sense of anticipation of discovery. Winding up the hills through tall, dry eucalypt forests and down again past damp undergrowth and low-lying green ferns, the sequence of arrival is revealed slowly until the bay's eventual appearance at the last moment. Emerging at the top of the dunes, between tussocks of grass near the high-tide mark, the bay is defined for visitors by an arc of unexpectedly white, silica-rich sand. Below the great tumble of delicate natural treasures washed up by the waves which define the high-tide mark, the beach here is lapped by rippling and crystal-clear waters on calm days and smashed with ferocious dumping waves and salty spume when gales whip in from the East.

Prompting questions of unknown origins and stretches of time spent adrift, grey-weathered sticks and sun-bleached shells, half-buried crab carapaces and chalky cuttlebones all bring with them a sense of the past, a sense of renewal in the ocean and, in turn, a materiality suggestive of passing time.

Fig.5

Cape Hauy:

Fig. 6

Fig. 7

Curling North East away from Fortescue Bay, the walking track to Cape Hauy brings into focus a powerful play of light and shadow in the environment. After walking along the coastline from Fortescue Bay for a short while with its sloshing waves and swirling kelp, the track heads uphill to the South East and into a zone of largely dry sclerophyll forest. Along this section of path, before it winds its way back down through a wet area of low scrub to the coastal heathland and the powerfully dominant Cape beyond, a number of burnt-out and hollowed tree trunks lean and lie in stark contrast to the surrounding scrub. Twisting and lifting in their weathered grey exteriors, these totemic objects are also heavily grounded in their place, holding within them piercing black glimpses of impenetrable shadow.

Fig. 8

A burnt-out interior from an unknown time suggests exposure to a ravaging fire of unknown size, danger and intensity. As once living, now relics in the landscape, these burnt-out tree forms hint at the effects of the elements and seasons on the landscape over time, while eliciting a curiosity in the powerful contrasts of brightly weathered exteriors and shadowy, mysterious inner spaces.

Canoe Bay:

Fig.9

A short walk North along the coast from Fortescue Bay, through a repeating series of forested spurs and draws, sits Canoe Bay. The nature of the forest canopy here throws shafts of light down to the undergrowth; damp and wet on the Southern side of spurs, and dry and crunchy from the fallen casuarina needles under foot on the Northern sides. This approach and place is very much about heightened contrasts: the shadow and the light; the damp and the dry; and - upon arrival at Canoe bay - a powerful sense of the hard and the soft.

Approaching this bay on a warm afternoon brings with it a definitive feeling of contrasting materiality and the sense of both the passage of deep and immediate time. Curving around the deep clear and aqua body of water swirling with twists of olive bull kelp, Canoe Bay is defined by a staccato string of small and large, loose surrounding boulders and between them, the vertical brush-like extensions of yellowed and dry native grasses. This coexistence of the feathery dry grass, defiantly sprouting from between such massive neighbours, also leaves a strong sense of reverence for this place of powerful contrasts.

Fig. 10

Adding to this sense of contrasts, Canoe Bay is home to a long-scuttled steam hopper barge. Clearly seen above the waterline as an elongated stroke of burnt orange against blue, the rusting wreck sits in stark contrast to its pristine surrounds. This was an incredibly memorable image for me of the decaying man-made structure set against the backdrop of nature, offering in turn a reminder of the awesome and inevitable effects of time.

Background:

Many years before moving to Tasmania to undertake research in the fine arts, I had been a jeweller's apprentice, a timber yard worker and a registered architect working in Melbourne. Despite living in Melbourne as an adult, I had grown up in Ballarat - a much smaller regional place, filled with childhood memories of family holidays and of making and collecting.

Stamps, gemstones, shells and old coins would all find their way into small boxes, containers and jars in my creaking wardrobe. Secreted away and precious, each of these collections held memories of the efforts taken and the time spent bringing them together, from family trips fossicking in the bush to slow ambles along the high-tide line of various beaches. As much as the collections themselves, it was the housing for these collections, which equally fascinated me. Old scratched tobacco tins, hollowed-out books or wooden pencil boxes with sliding lids all held their own mysterious inner worlds, a promise of the unknown and a great sense of anticipation, discovery and surprise.

This passion for small spaces, details and preciousness led me in time to work as a jeweller's apprentice before graduating from high school to undertake a degree in architecture, where I discovered a wealth of creative inspiration in the writings and works of architects concerned with a phenomenological understanding of embodied spatial experience.

Reinforcing this learning, was a personal backpacking tour through Switzerland and Germany to experience a series of buildings designed by the Swiss architect Peter Zumthor. As the physical embodiment of the philosophies that I had loved to read about concerning spatial and sensorial experience, Zumthor's buildings were filled

with an almost religious attention to detail and respect for materiality and place. Deeply infused with a sense of craftsmanship, these places somehow managed to offer a powerful means of interpreting the local environment while offering each visitor a personal sense of their own place within it.

Several years after visiting these buildings and while working as a graduate architect in Melbourne, I felt an urge to be out of the city and to invest time in a part of Australia's landscape that I had not experienced before. With a fundamental understanding of the island, but having never been there myself, Tasmania was the perfect choice of place to discover and to explore. From the outset, Tasmania presented itself as a wild and beautiful place that was unlike anywhere I had ever experienced. By slowing down and reflecting during my first encounter, the island landscapes left me with a powerful sense of beauty, mystery and discovery.

The clarity of light and contrasting shadows revealed a phenomenal wealth of minute detail across the island. Walking through parts of the temperate Tarkine rainforest in the state's North West, damp and intensely coloured lichens, fungi and ferns on the forest floor would be shrouded in shafts of light from the canopy high above, while a deep black pool fed by a gurgling stream nearby would offer a powerful depth of contrast and mysterious shadow. At the Southern end of Bruny Island, located just off the South Eastern coastline of Tasmania, the dolerite cliffs of the headland loomed over a heaving body of water below. Charged with atmosphere on an overcast day, this place spoke of an ephemeral and shifting beauty, with veils of mist rolling in over the headland and brief pockets of sunlight appearing over the water in the distance. And yet the shifting nature of the moment here seemed somehow tethered, simultaneously, to a phenomenal sense of deep time and the unchanged.

Far from Melbourne with its high rises and intermittent squealing trams, the quiet mystery and unassuming beauty of Tasmania left me resolute to return one day to experience the place once more. Now, some 10 years after my first time on the island, I have moved to Tasmania to live, work and to study in Hobart.

Terms of Reference:

Vessel

Because the aim of this research is to capture something of the ephemeral, mysterious qualities encountered in each of the respective landscape sites, the word "vessel" has been selected to define the project's sculptural forms rather than the more prosaic terms "box" or "container", given both the poetic resonance of the word and its multiple etymological uses and meanings.

Historical uses of the word "vessel" both in English and its translated form in French, vaisseau, have provided a number of key influences for the adoption and use of the term in the context of this project.

In an architectural sense, the vaisseau relates to "the interior space of a building, most often vaulted. It is of elongated plan and its elevation corresponds to more than one floor of the building" (Montclos 1977). The nave of a church, for instance, may be comprised of one or several vaisseaux.

In English, a vessel also has multiple meanings, with the Oxford English Dictionary considering it, amongst other things, as both "a hollow container" and "a duct or canal holding or conveying blood or other fluid" (Oxford Dictionaries).
In the context of this research, the "vessel" is considered for its suggestion of all these listed meanings: from the French sense, as a long, narrow enclosed space, and from English, as both a container and a conduit, in this instance, for experiences and responses to place.

With a view to maintaining consistency throughout the research, the phrase "vessel form" will be used as a broadly encompassing term to describe containers, boxes, enclosing or carrying devices as they have been adopted in creative expression both in the past and in the studio-based research.

Trace

Where the studio-based sculptural vessel forms integrate found objects from the landscape sites visited, it is intended that these objects be referred to as "traces" of landscape and place.

The intent behind each of the sculptural vessel forms which integrate found objects is, in some way, to refer back to, or reference, the landscape of origin.
As with the decision to use the term "vessel" rather than "box", it was decided that the term "souvenir" or "memento" carries with it too many undesirable connotations; for instance, the suggestion of a mass-produced, purchased or inorganic object, rather than a "one-off", found, individual and organic object.
For the purposes of this project, "trace" provides a more appropriate poetic resonance. Aspects of "the souvenir" which are relevant and appropriate to this study are considered through the writings of Susan Stewart in Chapter 1, under the title Traces of Place and Collecting.

The use of the word trace in this research is also considered in relation to French Philosopher Jacques Derrida's Deconstructive practice. Discussed in further detail in Chapter 1, through Derrida's work, a 'trace' is considered as a metaphor for the effect of reversing two terms in a hierarchical opposition. In the context of this project, the hierarchical oppositions of "the sample" (small part of the landscape) and "the whole" (the entire landscape) are considered for the way in which the two concepts mutually depend on and refer to each other.

A "trace", then, is defined as "a very small quantity" and "a mark, object, or other indication of the existence or passing of something" (Oxford Dictionaries), while alluding to the mutual conceptual reliance in the relationship between a "trace" of the landscape and the wider landscape itself.

Phenomenology

From a phenomenological standpoint as it relates to the embodied experience of architectural environments, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Juhanni Pallasmaa, Steven Holl and Peter Zumthor have all proposed in their own words the way in which, as

Pallasmaa puts it, there is a "loss of plasticity" in contemporary architecture and that its current trajectory is towards becoming "the retinal art of the eye" (Holl, Pallasmaa & Pérez Gómez 1994, p. 29).

To combat this "ocular-centric" trend in architectural design, a returning to those elements of spatial experience which re-create an "architecture of the senses" is argued. While acknowledging the importance of the visual realm, Holl, Pallasmaa and Pérez Gómez note that, "Architecture involves seven realms of sensory experience which interact and infuse each other" (Holl, Pallasmaa & Pérez Gómez 1994, p. 30) and that "every touching experience of architecture is multi-sensory; qualities of matter, space, and scale are measured equally by eye, ear, nose, skin, tongue, skeleton and muscle" (Holl, Pallasmaa & Pérez Gómez 1994, p. 30). In turn, these architects and spatial theoreticians provide a strong position and argument for a "phenomenological" approach to design, whereby spaces are conceived with all the human senses in mind.

Given the intent of this project to respond to the sense of place brought about by each of the selected environments, the argument that these architects and spatial theoreticians put forward for a "multi-sensory" approach to design makes sense as a starting point for the development of a methodology. This phenomenological approach suggests a means of translating personal experiences in the environment from the macro to the micro scale.

For the purposes of this study, then, the term "phenomenology" will be considered as it relates solely to the writings of architectural theoreticians, philosophers and practitioners, focusing on spatial experience as a complete sensory perception of space. Phenomenology in this sense, will relate then to the way in which we respond both consciously and subconsciously to the spatial and embodied experience of surrounding environments. The phenomenological sub-themes which have emerged through the literature review have then formed the basis for a studio methodology which might enable the translation of spatial experience at the macro scale to a spatial response at the micro scale.

The first chapter of this exegesis introduces a conceptual framework for the project, highlighting and underpinning the influential themes and authors that have emerged in the course of the research. Five core themes are investigated in this chapter, including Containment / Concealment / Revelation, The Vessel Form in Context, Distilling a Sense of Place, Traces of Place and Collecting, and Spatial Experience as Phenomenon. Chapter 2 considers the Vessel Form in Contemporary Art and Creative Practice. Focusing on the artwork of Robert Rauschenberg, Joseph Cornell and Donald Judd, the craftsmanship of Damien Wright and the architecture of Peter Zumthor, this chapter considers the ways in which the vessel form has been adopted by contemporary practitioners as a moving medium for creative expression. Chapter 3 then provides an introduction to my studio-based research in response to four selected landscapes. Themed by location, this chapter considers the studio-based methodology and sculptural responses to Mt Lyell, Fortescue Bay, Canoe Bay and Cape Hauy.

Chapter 1

The potential for the vessel form to act as a phenomenological device and sculptural response to the sense of mystery, awe and reverence experienced in natural Tasmanian landscapes forms the central theme of this investigation.

While references for this study have been drawn from a range of sources - including written texts by architects and spatial philosophers who discuss their understanding of spatial and phenomenological experience, as well as historic examples of the vessel form as a vehicle for creative expression in craft and artistic practice - this review will focus on the five key themes which emerged through the literature review.

The first of these themes, "**Containment / Concealment / Revelation**" introduces the writings of Christopher Alexander, Sara Ishikawa, Murray Silverstein and Gaston Bachelard - a group of authors and philosophers who have each investigated and posited the psychological necessity of private, secret or hidden spaces in our lives. The established strength of this theme throughout the literature review provides convincing evidence and support for the initially intuitive belief when beginning the studio research that, given my own personal experience of collecting and making vessel forms, these precious spaces, hidden from view, held a psychological power unlike any other.

The second theme, "**The Vessel Form in Context**", introduces historical examples of the vessel form, highlighting the importance of the device through history as a powerful medium for creative expression and as a potent vehicle for conveying both symbolic and literal cultural meaning.

Given the aim of responding sculpturally to a series of natural landscapes in my studio-led research, "**Distilling a Sense of Place**" forms a key, third theme. While a purely philosophical discussion around the definition of "place" does not form a key driver for this research, the writings of several spatially and place–focused philosophers, including Martin Heidegger, Jeff Malpas, Yi-Fu Tuan, Walter Benjamin

and Gaston Bachelard, all provide key background and understanding into how places, or the sense and aura of place, might be better understood, "known" and remembered in the course of undertaking preliminary site visits and field studies.

The fourth theme of "**Traces of Place and Collecting**" emerges as a core theme in the research. Drawing largely from the writings of Susan Stewart and her consideration of the souvenir and the collection as well as Jacques Derrida's approach to deconstructive practice, Collected Traces of Landscape discusses the way in which objects sampled or collected from an environment have the power to remind us and to evoke nostalgic memories of our past experiences in specific locations.

Drawing from my background as an architect with a particular passion for the sensorial aspects of highly refined and conceived architectural environments, "**Spatial Experience as Phenomenon**" was established as the pivotal theme and lens through which my studio methodology would develop and be defined. Of particular relevance here are the writings of architects Peter Zumthor, Steven Holl and Juhani Pallasmaa.

Containment / Concealment / Revelation

In order to establish an underpinning of the theoretical explanation for why the vessel form can function as a way of instilling awe and reverence, several authors consider the psychological necessity of secret places. Alexander, Ishikawa and Silverstein's *A Pattern Language*, reflects upon the theme, explaining that, "There is a need in people to live with a secret place in their homes: a place that is used in special ways, and revealed only at very special moments" (1977, p. 930). They go on to note that:

> …to live in a home where there is such a place alters your experience. It invites you to put something precious there, to conceal, to let only some in on the secret and not others. It allows you to keep something that is precious in an entirely personal way, so that no one may ever find it, until the moment you say to your friend, "Now I am going to show you something special" – and tell the story behind it… (Alexander, Ishikawa & Silverstein 1977, p. 930).

Bachelard also reinforces the theme, considering how we experience and "need" intimate places in our lives:

> … With the theme of drawers, chests, locks and wardrobes … the unfathomable store of daydreams of intimacy. Wardrobes with their shelves, desks with their drawers, and chests with their false bottoms are veritable organs of the secret psychological life. Indeed, without these "objects" and a few others in equally high favour, our intimate life would lack a model of intimacy. They are hybrid objects, subject objects. Like us, through us and for us, they have a quality of intimacy… An anthology devoted to small boxes, such as chests and caskets, would constitute an important chapter in psychology. These complex pieces that a craftsman creates are very evident witnesses of the need for secrecy, of an intuitive sense of hiding places… (Bachelard & Jolas 1994, pp. 78-81).

In addition to the psychological need for secrecy, Bachelard considers how the vessel form has the ability to affect and shift our perceptions of space and scale:

> …Chests, especially small caskets, over which we may have more complete mastery, are objects that may be opened. When a casket is closed, it is returned to the general community of objects; it takes its place in exterior space. But it opens! ...from the moment the casket is opened, dialectics (of inside and outside) no longer exist. The outside is effaced in one stroke, an atmosphere of novelty and surprise reigns. The outside has no more meaning. And quite paradoxically, even cubic dimensions have no more meaning, for the reason that a new dimension – the dimension of intimacy – has just opened up. For someone who is a good judge of values, and who sees things from the angle of the values of intimacy, this dimension can be an infinite one... (Bachelard & Jolas 1994, pp. 85-86).

In the context of this investigation, the observations of Bachelard, Alexander, Ishikawa and Silverstein provide key insights into how an interactive, intimate space may be used to engage or focus a viewer on traces of the natural environment, through the development of sculptural devices which promote curiosity, anticipation and surprise.

The Vessel Form in Context:

Fig. 11

Fig. 12

Fig.13

Preliminary research on the vessel form and its adoption through history as a medium for creative expression has highlighted its importance in human culture as a powerful symbolic device in ritual, narrative and worship well beyond its pragmatic functions. This contextual understanding of the way in which the vessel form has been adopted in the past as a means of responding symbolically to histories, beliefs or narratives has provided key inspiration and support for the adoption of the vessel form as the primary medium of expression in the studio-based research.

In her reference book, *Antique Boxes, Inside and Out*, Genevieve Cummins notes that the vessel or box form has such an appeal because its form is present in so many aspects of our daily lives. Essentially, we live in them, work in them, store or safeguard our valuables in them, and after our lives have ended we may be buried in them - even the television, computer or tablets that we look at each day could be seen as extensions of the vessel form. Cummins notes that "over hundreds, even thousands of years man has felt the need to contain, protect, preserve and present precious items" and that "the box is the most logical way to do this" (Cummins 2006, p. 15).

Tied in many cases to religious rituals, cultural traditions or the recording of historical events, the vessel form has been embraced time and again across cultures for its ability to convey a narrative while evoking a sense of mystery, preciousness, anticipation and surprise.

Cummins highlights the record of powerfully symbolic early vessel forms found in the royal tombs in the Great Pyramids of Egypt. From sarcophagi which cradled the

bodies of the deceased and were adorned with religious figures, to boxes for cosmetics and other provisions in the afterlife, these vessel forms served as containers of symbolic meaning well beyond their simple forms.

Fig.14 Fig.15 Fig.16

Another example of the vessel form as it has been embraced as a means of establishing a sense of occasion, wonder and awe in a viewer can be seen in the stacking food box or "Jūbako" above (Fig. 14). Designed and crafted in Late Edo era Japan, by Shibata Zeshin (1807–1891), the Jūbako is a stacking series of vessels "designed for a celebratory meal, such as New Year's feast"(The Met Museum 2018). Embracing a decorative, modern design "depicting taro plants (satoimo) and chrysanthemum flowers" , the stylised lacquered illustrations embrace a rich layering of symbolism. The taro plants represent longevity (Saitomo Root (Tarot)), while the chrysanthemum flower "references the symbol of Japan's monarchy, traditionally referred to as the chrysanthemum throne" (New York Times 2018). For a dinner guest participating in this New Year's Feast, the vessel form serves to heighten emotions surrounding the celebration by honouring the precious delicacies stored within, while the exterior decorations reference much larger concepts of time, duration and a reverence for the auspicious nature of the nation's governing body.

Further symbolic associations and figurative depictions are inherent in the reliquary boxes made in Limoges during the Middle Ages, as can be seen in the example of the French Reliquary above (Fig. 15) which has a depiction of the adoration of the Magi or Three Kings decoratively enamelled across the vessel's form. As noted by the National Museum of Scotland, "In the medieval period relics of saints – fragments of bone, clothing and other items – were powerful symbols. The relics were preserved and cherished, often in beautifully designed and expensive reliquaries or shrines, and

were shown to the faithful on special occasions. Pilgrims would travel long distances to see them" (National Museum of Scotland 2018). Here, "the Kings are shown following the star of Bethlehem, while on the front panel they bring their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to Jesus and the Virgin Mary" (National Museum of Scotland 2018). This example typifies the way in which many of these historical vessel forms would embrace delicate figurative details or embellishments, with gold and precious stones as a means of evoking a sense of awe in the viewer. These vessels then were infused with cultural and religious significance. While they physically served to house small religious artefacts, they also reinforced for the viewer the relics' sense of preciousness. In their design, materiality and detailing they would heighten the viewer's sense of awe and wonder towards both the relic and to the religion more broadly.

Judaism also provides a strong example of the powerful means by which the vessel form has been embraced to symbolically carry meaning for a viewer well beyond the vessel's physical form. The Phylactery case (or "Tefellin" as a pair) (Fig. 16) is a container "for storing segments of parchment sheets inscribed with verses from *Exodus* 13:1-10,11-16, and from *Deuteronomy* 6:4-9,11,13-21" (The Israel Museum, Unknown 2016a). Joseph Caro, the medieval lawyer and mystic, explains that "tefillin are placed on the arm adjacent to the heart and on the head above the brain to demonstrate that these two major organs are willing to perform the service of God" (Naiman 1995, p. 118). While imagery is not used on the exterior of the Phylactery case in the way that it is used on the reliquaries of Limoges, key script from a religious text is in some cases inscribed on the vessel's exterior, and this writing is used to bring the wearer's attention to those poignant events underpinning the religion itself. Through their ritual involvement in faith practices, these very small and precious vessels take on a wealth of symbolic and religious significance, alluding to a belief system both beyond and without scale.

Throughout these historical vessel examples, illustrative depictions and text-based or symbolic references to religious and historical events have tended to dominate both the appearance of and means by which the vessel forms have inspired a sense of wonder in their viewers.

Building upon this understanding, my aim is to respond sculpturally to the Tasmanian landscape. To do this, my approach to the studio-based investigation is to avoid the more literal depictions, figurative or text-based approaches of these historical examples which tend to ground the creative works in a particular time or style, in favour of a more abstracted approach which might leave the works – like the landscapes visited – open to interpretation.

Distilling a Sense of Place:

In the context of this study, place is also considered beyond the intimate scale of the wardrobes and caskets described by Gaston Bachelard. While the importance of and need for secret places has been established as a powerful means by which to connect people with "the dimension of intimacy" (Bachelard & Jolas 1994, pp. 85-86), one of the primary goals and fundamental undercurrents to the research is to better understand just how the vessel form, with its ability to affect our perception of space and scale, might be used as a sculptural device to respond to and connect people with a sense of the wider landscape or place. The work of authors and philosophers, including Yi-Fu Tuan, Walter Benjamin, Gaston Bachelard, Henri Bergson, and Jeff Malpas, has provided a conceptual basis for my understanding of place and given the sense of mystery and awe experienced in the selected landscapes; its aura.

Tuan, the humanist geographer, talks about two types of places – "places that yield their meaning to the eye, and places that are known only after prolonged experience" – distinguishing the first type as "public symbols" and the second as "fields of care" (Tuan 1974, p. 412).

As a means of providing examples for these definitions, Tuan considers the general day-to-day goings on of a typical, non-descript farmyard in the country with its bustling rural activities as a "field of care"(p. 412) – an environment that does not seek to project an image to outsiders, but all the same evokes a strong sense of affection. Countering this type of place, Tuan considers the Arc de Triomphe in Paris as a "public symbol"(p. 412) – commanding attention and even awe, yet not necessarily evoking emotional fondness. In the context of this research, it is the "fields of care" as Tuan defines them, which have elicited the strongest emotional reaction in my travels through the Tasmanian landscape - places which evoke

affection for their very essence, or spirit of place, rather than a formally or intentionally designed environment.

Tuan considers the Danish architect and urban planner Steen Eiler Rasmussen's view of the way that we come to know such places. One of these ways, he suggests, is repeated experience: "the feel of place gets under our skin in the course of day-to-day contact, the feel of the pavement, the smell of the evening air, and the colour of Autumn foliage become, through long acquaintance, extensions of ourselves… Repetition is of the essence"(Rasmussen 1964) In the context of this research, Tuan and Rasmussen's ideas reinforce my approach of returning to the selected landscapes at different stages of the year in order to experience and better understand them through the seasons.

By way of understanding the mysterious sense of awe, wonder and reverence experienced in the selected landscapes, Walter Benjamin's book, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* considers the concept of aura. In relation to the landscape, Benjamin notes that, "If, while resting on a summer afternoon, you follow with your eyes a mountain range on the horizon or a branch which casts its shadow over you, you experience the aura of those mountains, of that branch" (Benjamin 2008, p. 5). For me, time spent physically experiencing the selected environments has afforded a means by which to gain a personal sense of place and its aura. Suggesting a way in which to translate this aura of mystery and reverence of place into a sculptural form, Benjamin notes, "that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art"(p. 4). In turn, it would stand to reason that by embracing one-off hand-making skills and an approach to each object which responds to a "uniqueness" of place, it may be possible to heighten a sense of their mysterious aura.

Jeffrey Malpas, in his books *Experience and Place* (1999) and *Heidegger's Topology: Being, Place, World* (2006), begins to touch on the way in which knowing a place is as much an internal or psychological investigation as it is an exterior or landscape investigation. The author Edward Relph paraphrases Malpas's ideas by noting that a place is "somewhere that is simultaneously bounded and distinctive yet in which we are opened to the world and the world is opened to us" (Relph 2015).

Malpas' commentary on the features of place provide strong evidence for the use of the vessel form as a potent vehicle to explore the concept of place while investigating the reasons for our own personal response to it, noting that, like the vessel form, "one of the features of place is the way in which it establishes relations of inside and outside – relations that are directly tied to the essential connection between place and boundary or limit" (Malpas 2012, p. 2). In the same way that the viewer is intended to allow their focus and consciousness to drift into the completed vessel forms of the studio work in order to consider their details and meaning, Malpas suggests that, "To be located (in place) is to be within, to be somehow enclosed, but in a way that at the same time opens up, that makes possible" (p. 2).

Malpas also puts forward his belief that any thinking of place should be moving towards the ideas "of opening and closing, of concealing and revealing, of focus and horizon, of finitude and 'transcendence', of limit and possibility…" (p. 2). In turn, the evidence for the use of the vessel form as a sculptural device in response to place is further strengthened.

Henri Bergson's statement that "…philosophers, in spite of their apparent divergencies, agree in distinguishing two profoundly different ways of knowing a thing: the first implies that we move round the object; the second that we enter into it" (Bergson, Anderson & Anderson 2014, p. 21) is a profound and appropriate one. Bergson's comments provide a strong indication for the ways in which potential sculptural vessel forms may offer themselves to be "known" to the viewer, firstly through the ability of the viewer to move around the objects and, secondly, through the aid of the integrated traces of landscape, which take the viewer's focus inside the forms, allowing them in a sense to "enter into" the sculptural responses to place.

In his book *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*, Malpas discusses Gaston Bachelard's idea that the self is to be discovered through an investigation of the places it inhabits (Malpas 2018, p. 5), noting that Bachelard "talks of both the love of place – 'topophilia' – and of the investigation of places – 'topoanalysis' – as

essential notions in any phenomenological/psychoanalytic study of memory, self and mind" (p. 5).

It is Bachelard's dual understanding of place which I aim to evoke in the sculptural vessel forms, where revelations of place are simultaneously revelations of self. Having returned to Hobart to live, many years after first visiting and experiencing the Tasmanian landscape, it has become clear through the research that I have also found the landscapes of Tasmania to provide a hugely enriching environment and place for personal understanding and creative growth. Drawn back to the island after many years for its natural beauty and powerful sense of the unknown, a deeper study of these mysterious places has also provided me with a much greater insight into my own views and beliefs around creative practice, work and relationships. One such insight has involved the renewed understanding and importance of 'the play of opposites' and duality in the creation of positive tension within creative compositions. Exploring abstract thought as a vitally important element to both balance and inform daily work practices has been another insight - especially within the creative field of architecture. And with regard to relationships, the importance of exploring the wilderness with my partner Tonya, sharing and discussing creative process and philosophy has been a hugely helpful and enjoyable discovery.

Traces of Place and Collecting:

Given the integration of various found objects or elements from selected environments in Tasmania in a number of my vessel forms, traces of place are considered for this review as part of a personalised ritual in response to the sense of place experienced in the selected landscapes while providing a symbolic link to the wider landscape for the viewer.

In her extensive study, *On Longing* (1993), Susan Stewart examines the ways in which the souvenir and the collection are objects mediating experience in time and space. Stewart considers that the "capacity of objects to serve as traces of authentic experience is, in fact, exemplified by the souvenir" (Stewart 1993, p. 135). In this respect, Stewart notes that "the souvenir distinguishes experiences" and that "we do not need or desire souvenirs of events that are repeatable. Rather, we need and desire souvenirs of events that are reportable, events whose materiality has escaped us,

events that thereby exist only through the invention of narrative" (p. 135). Stewart understands that, just like the collection, the souvenir "always displays the romance of contraband, for its scandal is its removal from its "natural" location. Yet it is only by means of its material relation to that location that it acquires its value..." (p. 135).

Importantly for this study, Stewart highlights that the strength behind the souvenir is due to its nature as something which is always incomplete (p. 136). She suggests that this power works in two ways: firstly, because the object is inextricably linked to its place of origin "in the sense that it is a sample" (p. 136); and, secondly, because the souvenir remains "impoverished and partial," it must be supplemented by "a narrative discourse which articulates the play of desire" (p. 136).

Stewart's insight into to the concept of the souvenir suggests a sort of duality to the understanding of its conceptual power. Stewart's descriptions of a souvenir on the one hand being "impoverished and partial", "speaking to a context of origin through a language of longing" (p. 135), and that "its scandal is its removal from its 'natural location,'" (p.135) on the other hand supports the use of an alternative term to souvenir for this study, namely the "trace".

Given the intent for these small traces of landscape to serve as both a focal point in and of themselves (as a small part of the landscape) while referencing, in essence, an entire landscape, the word "trace" is also chosen for its reference to the same term used in the Deconstructive practice of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida. While Derrida's work focuses largely on the analysis of oppositional hierarchies in philosophical and literary texts (Balkin 1987, p. 4), his concept of trace also finds some relevance for this project in considering the oppositional hierarchy of "the sample" or trace of the landscape and "the whole" or entire landscape.
For Derrida, two terms in a hierarchical opposition – for instance, black and white or similarity and difference – are mutually reliant for their coherence (Tiefenbrun 2010, p. 212). Derrida gives this relationship the term *différance*, "a pun based upon the French word *differer*, which means both to differ and to defer" (Balkin 1987, p. 10). In this way, Derrida suggests that the two terms in a hierarchical opposition both differ from and defer to each other in the sense that they are "fundamentally dependant on the other" (Balkin 1987, p. 11). As suggested by Jack Balkin, "Derrida

would also say that in each case the first concept bears the traces of the second concept, just as the second concept bears the traces of the first" (Balkin 1987, p. 11).

With Derrida's work in mind, the concept of a trace or sample of the landscape simply could not exist without the concept of the "whole" landscape – as each relies conceptually upon the other for their mutual coherence.

In the context of this project, the term "trace" is also considered for the way in which a small part of the landscape (the conceptual trace of landscape) simultaneously differs and defers in the mind of the viewer to the concept of the whole or wider landscapes of Tasmania.

Spatial Experience and Phenomenon:

With the design and composition of the vessel forms taking their cue from a phenomenological understanding of architectural spatial experience, several authors and architects have emerged through the literature review, providing key phenomenological insight.

Key amongst these influential figures is Peter Zumthor. As an architect embracing a phenomenological understanding of spatial experience, Zumthor designs buildings in a way which deftly choreographs the sensorial experiences of a visitor, eliciting through each building an inevitable emotional response and series of subtle physical reactions to spatial encounters. In parts of these structures, the sounds of local bird and insect life float through a porous exterior fabric, re-connecting a person with the essence of the local environment. The spatial pressure and release of an enclosed stairwell, reaching up to its landing where a full height window frames a city, can elicit an involuntary deep breath, relaxation and contemplation – the weight of a deeply coloured leather curtain providing a sensorial threshold through which the body must push with determination, building anticipation for what is to be discovered beyond. For the purposes of this research, it is the understanding of how we, as humans, experience architectural space which fascinates me and provides a guiding inspiration for the methodological approach to the creation of the vessel forms exhibited. This discussion directly informs the potential for a

phenomenological understanding of spatial experience in architecture to manifest itself at the much smaller, sculptural scale of the vessel form in its attempt to respond to and connect with place.

In his widely acclaimed text, *The Eyes of the Skin*, architect and theoretician Juhanni Pallasmaa suggests that "every touching experience of architecture is multi-sensory" (Pallasmaa, Juhani 2012, p. 41) and that "qualities of space, matter and scale are measured equally by the eye, ear, nose, skin, tongue, skeleton and muscle" (p. 41). In fact, Pallasmaa goes on to reference the belief in Steinerian philosophy that "we actually utilise no less than 12 senses" (Pallasmaa, Juhani 2012, p. 42). Key factors shared by these architects as contributing to an overall spatial experience that will be explored further as sub-themes in the following section include the importance of materiality, time, light, shadow and scale.

Materiality:

A key sub-theme emerging from the phenomenological aspects of the research involves the powerful ability of materiality to both shape and establish a sense of tactility in a space. With the aim of responding to the intrinsic contrasts in materiality of the selected landscapes visited in Tasmania, returning to the theme of materiality as a guide for decisions around the vessel form's tactile offerings and response to place has been essential.

Steven Holl notes that "when the materiality of the details forming an architectural space become evident, the haptic realm is opened up; sensory experience is intensified; [and] psychological dimensions are engaged" (Holl, Pallasmaa & Pérez Gómez 1994, p. 91). Suggesting the examples of "the texture of a silk drape, the sharp corners of cut steel, the mottled shade and shadow of rough sprayed plaster or the sound of a spoon striking a concave wooden bowl", Holl believes that these elements "reveal an authentic essence which stimulates the senses" (p. 94).

Peter Zumthor also alludes to material's contribution to atmosphere, noting that there is also a "critical proximity" between materials. If a material is heavy or light, warm or cool, hard or soft, Zumthor describes that, in the process of designing, "there's a certain point where you'll find they're too far away from each other to

react, and there's a point too where they're too close together, and that [this] kills them" (Zumthor 2006, p. 27).

Pallasmaa suggests that the maker ought to "listen to his material" (Pallasmaa, J. 2009, p. 9). because "materials and surfaces have a language of their own" (McCarter & Pallasma 2012, p. 82). Various examples are considered, from stone speaking of its ancient geological origins, to brick speaking of earth, fire, gravity and tradition, or wood "speaking of its two existences and timescales; its first life as a growing tree, and the second as a human artefact made by the caring hand of a carpenter or cabinet maker" (p. 79).

With this understanding of a material language in mind, the sculptural vessel forms are intended to embrace the contrasts and resulting tensions between natural and man-made materials in order to respond to those contrasts of experience in the landscape.

Time:

When visiting and experiencing many of the natural sites for this research, a sense of ancient or "deep time" is felt strongly. The ancient geology of the rocks speaks of time not in days or weeks, but in eons and millennia, a "deep" timescale we can barely comprehend. And yet in the same moment, a wave from the rising tide slaps the rusting hull of a scuttled barge and we are reminded of time as it is measured in seconds, hours, days and years. These latter timescales are ones that we can grasp and which provide us with a sense of our own existence rooted in time.

Given the hope of responding to this contrasting sense of both ancient and more immediate time scales in the landscape through the vessel form, writings considering a phenomenological sense of time or timelessness provide an important touchstone and sub-theme for the research.

Pallasmaa writes that "in the greatest of buildings, time stands firmly still" (Pallasmaa, Juhani 2012, p. 56), alluding to the potential for architectural spaces to be in a sense "timeless". However, he also notes that many contemporary buildings

"do not incorporate the dimension of time, or the unavoidable and mentally significant process of ageing" (p. 34), and yet "we have a mental need to grasp that we are rooted in the continuity of time…" (p. 35). This phenomenological understanding of the importance of time to our mental wellbeing in surrounding environments speaks to the reasoning behind why such a sense of wonder is experienced in these natural landscapes, saturated simultaneously with examples of both decay and renewal.

Steven Holl also argues that "the destructive effects of increasing levels of media saturation resulting in stress and anxiety, might be countered in part by the distention of time in the perception of architectural space" (Holl, Pallasmaa & Pérez Gómez 1994, p. 74). To achieve this, Peter Zumthor alludes to the ability of architecture to influence the speed or pace of visitors in a space, with the belief that, while being a spatial art, "architecture, like music, is a temporal art" (Zumthor 2006, p. 41).

In the context of this research, both Holl and Zumthor's understanding of time as it relates to the temporal aspects of embodied experience in architectural space are considered in relation to the decisions behind the ageing of materials used in the artworks and also to the devices or means by which a visitor may be seduced into slowing down and reflecting in the context of an exhibition space.

The response to time in the context of this project is considered, then, as a contrasting tension between the ways we experience timescales in the landscape: those that we can fathom and comprehend, allowing us context and reference for our own existence, and those we cannot, which leave us questioning our position in time, fostering an overarching sense of mystery and awe.

Light:

Having moved to Tasmania from mainland Australia, I have come to find an entirely different sense of light in the landscape. The clarity in the air here seems to allow for a completely uninterrupted natural light to bring out and, in turn, clarify the very

essence of colour and form. Even the edges of distant silhouettes are rendered by the light here in the finest detail. The resulting experience of this clarity in the landscape is an astounding sense of awe. The landscape here becomes a visual feast. Foreground, middle ground and background all teem with detail and, on a clear day, with vibrant colour. Given this powerfully moving sense of light in the places visited as part of this research, light provides a key sub-theme in the forming of both my understanding of place and the development of a sculptural response to landscapes so tied to the clarity of light which illuminates them.

As one of several key authors on the theme of phenomenological experience of architectural space, Zumthor considers "the light on things" as a core theme in his reprinted lecture, "Atmospheres. Architectural Environments. Surrounding Objects". In his lecture, Zumthor describes an approach to the systematic lighting of materials and surfaces, considering "the way that they reflect the light" (Zumthor 2006, p. 59). While the exhibition space for this project is located indoors, Zumthor's comments highlight the importance of the clarity of the artificial light to be used and the way in which the materials chosen for the works will reflect that light in a way that appropriately references the atmospheric sense of light in the landscape.

Holl similarly acknowledges this aspect of atmosphere in his essay, "The Phenomenology of Architecture", noting that "the perceptual spirit and metaphysical strength of architecture are driven by the quality of light and shadow shaped by solids and voids, by opacities, transparencies and translucencies" (Holl, Pallasmaa & Pérez Gómez 1994, p. 63). Holl's writings highlight and remind us that there are many ways in which light may be experienced in a place, and that this may be a valuable exploration in sculptural responses to landscape. Pallasmaa and McCarter also consider the materiality and tactility of light, suggesting that, "natural light breathes life into architecture and connects the world with cosmic dimensions" (McCarter & Pallasma 2012; Pallasmaa, Juhani 2012, p. 151). There is also an acknowledgement that "no other medium of architecture – spatial configuration, geometry, proportioning, colour or detail – can express equally deep emotion, ranging from melancholy to joy, grief to ecstasy, sorrow to bliss" (McCarter & Pallasma 2012, p. 151).

In the context of this research, the means by which light is integrated with the vessel forms is critical to the way in which the sculptural responses serve to connect the viewer with a sense of the crisp natural light in the wider landscape.

Shadow:

Offering a counterpoint to the clarity of light, another important sub-theme underpinning the phenomenological aspect of the research is the intrigue and mysterious depth inherent in spaces occupied by shadow.

For most of the year, Tasmania receives some of the most beautiful and clear sunlight that I have ever witnessed in a landscape. The winter months, however, bring much shorter days and, by late June, the sun falls below the horizon some time before 5:00 pm, and a walk in the evening is inevitably cloaked in darkness.

In the summer months, too, this shadowy reminder is easily found in the landscape, in the darkened rock pools of streams in the forests or in the burned-out hollows of tree trunks. Given the bright clarity of the sun in this place and the contrasts offered by the shadows in the visited landscapes, understanding the ways in which shadow brings a sense of mystery to a place forms a key part of the investigation.

Pallasmaa suggests that during times of overpowering emotion, we close our eyes, turning off our more distancing sense of vision, while embracing instead the dreams of our imagination, the music that we hear, or the caressing touch of our loved ones (Pallasmaa, Juhani 2012, p. 50). Deep shadows, in this sense, are considered essential, "because they dim the sharpness of vision, make depth and distance ambiguous, and invite unconscious peripheral vision and tactile fantasy" (p. 50).

In his seminal meditation on the traditional Japanese sense of beauty and spatial experience, Jun'ichiro Tanizaki's essay "In Praise of Shadows" offers a stirring appreciation of the spatial experience of spaces shrouded in darkness. As a major writer of modern literature reflecting on daily Japanese life in the face of rapid 20th Century progress – Tanizaki considers the simple gesture of the alcove in a traditional Japanese home as a place where only dim light might fall, "forming

shadows within emptiness" (1977, p. 20). He notes that experiencing this spatial phenomena provides an atmosphere of "complete and utter silence" (p. 33) adding that, "by cutting off the light from this empty space … a quality of mystery and depth [is established] superior to that of any wall painting or ornament" (p. 21). In addition to the power and mystery held in the shadows of traditional Japanese temple architecture, Tanizaki highlights the mysterious play of light through the darkness provided by the presence of gold. Describing the experience of gold leaf shining through the shadows of a traditional Japanese temple interior, Tanizaki notes the ability of gold to "…pick up a distant glimmer from the garden, then suddenly send forth an ethereal glow, a faint golden light into the enveloping darkness" (p. 22).

Tanizaki's insights here offer a powerful influence for the adoption of a sculptural approach which is steeped in shadow. Given the ability of the vessel form to be displayed in a closed or open position, this idea of an intimately scaled void space filled with either light or shadow, or the mysterious contrast of both, has been an important consideration.

Scale:

Scale forms another important sub-theme of the research relating to phenomenological experience, given the research's intent to capture a sense of personal reverence of place. The studio works aim to capture a sense of the macrocosm or wider environment, embodied within the microcosm – a vessel form relatable to the human scale. In this way, the vessel form seeks to connect a viewer with a sense of the wider environment or place through their interaction with, or meditations on, the form in front of them.

In his essay, "The Ethos of Japanese Life", Yoshida Mitsukuni, the Japanese author and teacher, considers the "tray stones" or "bonseki" which were developed and widespread during the Sung and Ming dynasties in China prior to being introduced to Japan around the twelfth century. Here, "several small, carefully chosen stones were arranged on a tray meant to be placed indoors. The viewer was encouraged to see in it a natural setting, taking cues from the shape of the stones…with shapes

evoking the undulating lines of linked mountain ridges, they could carry those who gazed at them to the vastness of the natural landscape… Each was a miniature representation of the universe" (Mitskuni 1982, p. 17).

Gaston Bachelard, too, discusses scale in "The Poetics of Space". Musing on the phenomenological daydreams of the imagination brought about by the miniature, Bachelard considers a short quote from a dictionary of Christian Botany regarding the periwinkle: "reader, study the periwinkle in detail, and you will see how detail increases an object's stature" (Bachelard & Jolas 1994, p. 135).

This sense of the macro within the micro takes the philosopher to the notion of an "Intimate Immensity" (p. 183). We are reminded of the imagination's ability to transport us through daydreams and contemplation "outside the immediate world to a world that bears the mark of infinity" (p. 183).

In turn, Bachelard considers that there are two kinds of space – "the space of intimacy" and "world space" – noting that "when human solitude deepens, then the two immensities touch and become identical" (p. 203), an inner state is created unlike any other. In this way, Bachelard suggests, "every object invested with intimate space becomes the centre of all space" (p. 203).

The emergent themes from the literature review have offered a great wealth of influence and insight for the direction of the research. The established psychological and spatial power of the vessel form, as well as historical precedents of the medium, have reinforced the value of the project's creative direction. The concept of knowing place has been explored, while a deeper understanding of how to respond to a place's defined and unique sense of aura has been considered. By way of understanding the intuitive process of collecting, and the meaning or references that it might bring to a sculptural work, the concept of traces of place has also been investigated. Establishing a lens through which to translate the sense of place from the macro-scale to the micro-scale, an exploration of key themes shared by phenomenologically-inspired architects and theorists has been uncovered. In turn, materiality, time, light, shadow and scale have all been established as key phenomenological sub-themes

from which a base methodology for my studio practice has emerged. Reinforcing these influential themes, the works of several contemporary creative practitioners who have embraced the vessel form will be examined in the next chapter, including works by artists Robert Rauschenberg, Donald Judd and Joseph Cornell, craftsman Damien Wright, and architect Peter Zumthor.

Chapter 2

Providing strong inspiration for and an essential starting point from which to build the context for the research project, a series of works concerning "**The Vessel Form in Contemporary Art and Creative Practice"** are analysed in this chapter.

Artworks integrating the vessel form by Donald Judd, Robert Rauschenberg and Joseph Cornell provide powerful precedents and contemporary context for the use of the vessel form in sculptural practice. These works all embrace a sense of anticipation and discovery, of interaction with the viewer and abstracted narratives through their largely minimal forms. As such they have had a strong influence on my own art practice and have acted as key points of departure from which to explore the notion of a sculptural vessel form which responds specifically to place.

The work of Australian craftsman Damien Wright also provides a strong contextual example of the vessel form being embraced as a means of expressing or responding to historical narratives in an abstracted way. While my own work seeks to respond directly to landscapes rather than specific stories of people or historical events, the work of Wright has strongly influenced my own approach through the abstraction of the stories that they respond to, in a similar way that I might arrive at an abstracted response to a particular landscape. In addition to this, there is in Wright's work a strong understanding of materiality and the way in which those materials alone might be fashioned in order to "speak" about particular lives or stories, without necessarily resorting to literal descriptions through text or illustrative decorations.

One of the great inspirations behind this research has been my personal experience of several buildings designed by the architect Peter Zumthor. Materiality, time, light, shadow and scale are all integral elements in his phenomenological response to place. In order to begin to convey a sense of his work and the way that it has influenced my thinking, the Bruder Klaus Field Chapel in Germany, one of his very influential small buildings, is also considered. As a designed space which has offered both an incredibly inspiring embodied spatial experience and a deepened understanding of the concept of phenomenology, the Bruder Klaus Field Chapel is also considered here as a vessel form in the architectural sense of the word.

Robert Rauschenberg: (American, 1925–2008)
SCATOLE PERSONALI (1953)

Fig.17

From the first moment that I found the early work of Robert Rauschenberg, I felt a connection with his apparent desire to collect, to order and to categorise his experiences. There is also a sense in this early work of an appreciation for natural forms through collected bones, feathers, shells, and for small details and preciousness which speak to his memories of past experiences. For me, these responses are all integral to my own intuitive response to place and, in turn, have reinforced Rauschenberg as a very strong influence for the research.

The first such example of Rauschenberg's early sculptural work that I uncovered in my research, and which left a lasting impression, was his series of "Scatole Personali" or Personal Boxes. In her publication dedicated to the sculptural works of Cy Twombly, Kate Nesin refers in part to Robert Rauschenberg's eight months of travels with Cy Twombly in 1953 through Africa and Europe, noting that while in Italy,

> … Rauschenberg made and exhibited a number of miniature sculptures called Scatole Personali ("Personal boxes"), crude, colourful, charming, and, for the artist, charmed… Rauschenberg's [boxes] were closer to fetish objects in inspiration and intention than they were of the tension

> between surface and core in Western sculptural history, but they still had interiors, vitally invested ones. These Scatoli Personali contained an ostensible power because of what they also contained materially and they were interactive: they could be opened, their contents in some cases removable (Nesin 2014, p. 62).

Rauschenberg wrote a statement for his Rome exhibition of *Scatole Personali* and *Feticci Personali* series, revealing that he chose his materials "for either of two reasons: the richness of their past: like bone, hair, faded cloth and photos … or for their vivid abstract reality: like mirrors, bells, watch parts, bugs…" (Nesin 2014, p. 113). Nesin notes that Rauschenberg allowed that viewers may develop their own rituals about the objects and in this way "the artist empowered each viewer to personalize them, or to personalize his or her own way of relating to them" (p. 113).

In addressing the natural environment and a seeming desire to honour a series of found and collected objects which might validate or help to interpret his experiences while travelling in a new place, Rauschenberg's *Scatole Personali* offer perhaps the best example that I have found of a creative approach to expressing a response to an experience of place through the medium of the vessel form.

Robert Rauschenberg:
PUBLICONS (1978)

Fig.18

Fig.19

Fig.20

Fig.21

When visiting the selected landscapes as part of the research, varied senses of anticipation, discovery, awe and reverence are experienced. In historical examples of the vessel form, where conveying a sense of awe or wonder may be the intention of the maker, the vessel form is commonly adopted as a means of honouring religious icons or sacred objects. Rauschenberg embraces this theme of reverence through the honouring of a sacred object and the building of anticipation through a process of discovery in the approach to his *Publicon* series of sculptural works.

Similar to his *Scatole Personali* series in the adoption of the interactive vessel form to store and enshrine their found contents, Rauschenberg's *Publicon* series provides another powerful reference point for the direction of the research. In this series, everyday items are treated with an almost religious significance and, in turn, are imbued with a sense of wonder and potential meaning. As described by the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation:

> … the *Publicons* are cabinets, each of which opens to reveal an enshrined object. The title merges "icon," a reference to medieval reliquaries and Renaissance altarpieces, and "public," since the sculptures can be manipulated by the viewer (Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, Unknown 2016b).

The second aspect and influence from Rauschenberg's work here are the multiple configurations of the artwork available to the viewer. When in both the closed and open state, these vessels offer multiple artistic compositions of form and colour. Most of these vessel forms also integrate the use of electricity, with lights either on or off, adding further variation or configuration of spaces through both light and shadow. The idea of this infinite number of ways in which the vessel form might be displayed or interacted with is hugely appealing in the context of this project as a means of referencing in part the shifting temperatures, weather patterns and seasons experienced in the selected Tasmanian landscapes which only reveal their essence over time and through repeated interaction.

Damien Wright: (Australian)
'PARMA' BOX, 2008

Fig.22

Another strong influence for this project comes from renowned Australian craftsman Damien Wright and his collaboration with Melbourne-based architect Patrick Ness. Wright and Ness' collaboration provides a commanding influence on my own approach, imbued comfortably in its minimal form at a very human scale, with a sense of mystery, discovery and preciousness.

A custom-made commission piece, the *Parma Box* (Fig. 22) was made with secret compartments designed to hold a family's sentimental artefacts:

> … the chest is imbued with narrative and meaning, designed with hidden drawers and special locking mechanisms, concealing the treasured letters and medals of a grandfather who was a POW during the Second World War. Externally, the chest is jet black, made of ancient red gum; internally it is blond and made of Japanese oak. 'It's about the inaccessibility of a story,' says Wright… (NGV 2015).

From first sight, the *Parma Box* captures the viewer's imagination. Mystery, anticipation and a reverence for what is stored is experienced in the way in which the vessel form slowly, smoothly and tentatively reveals its contents through gentle interaction. This says just as much about the story inspiring the chest's design as it does about the craftsmanship and consideration of the object itself.

In material, too, this work offers a strong influence, with the timbers chosen reflecting their own deep histories and cultural association. The exterior of the chest is made from ancient red gum: "10,000 years old, its colour and texture the result of a process that began when the last ice age uprooted the tree and deposited it in a river bed" (Herald 2008). The colour of the timber is not stained by Wright, but has developed its deep and profoundly mysterious black colour through the processes of time and pressure. In contrast to the exterior, the softer, blond Japanese oak interior invites interaction and, in turn, deeper reflection on the narrative behind the work. This approach offers a very strong and inspiring example of how a response to place may be made in a timeless, minimal sense through the vessel form by embracing materiality, which also speaks of place.

Joseph Cornell: (American, 1903-1972)

Fig.23

Fig.24

Fig.25

As part of the preliminary research into 20th Century artists and their adoption of the vessel form as a medium for creative expression, the work of Joseph Cornell clearly presented itself as a potential influence.

While the aim of my work and research is not necessarily to convey a discrete narrative of place or time, I do aim to allude to my response to the greater landscape through the much smaller device of the vessel form. In the case of Joseph Cornell's work, each small vessel form appears to become an enchanted stage set, projecting the viewer from a small sense of scale to a much larger one within their mind's eye as they dwell within the framed volume, contemplating another realm.

This sense of theatre and transporting the viewer to another sense of scale reinforced by Jennifer Blessing of the Guggenheim Foundation, who notes of Cornell that, "unlike many European Surrealists … he was less interested in disturbing the viewer than in evoking enchanted worlds past and yet to come..." (Guggenheim Museum 2018).
In this way, Cornell's work establishes an imagined participation with the viewer, which Elizabeth Childs describes as "not physical, but psychological and creative" in which "the viewer may be playwright, choreographer, director, and performer in the spectacle of his choice" (Guggenheim Museum 2018).

While the integration of text, maps, or other man-made objects does not form part of the studio-based research, this ability of Cornell's work to surprise and transport the viewer to another place in their imagination provides a key influence for the work. As can be seen to varying extents in the three figures above, it is the more

formal aspects of Cornell's work that provide key inspiration. While seemingly intuitive in the nature of their composition, an exploration of light, shadow and reflection can be found in his *Setting for a Fairy Tale* (1942), which allows lighter objects in the foreground to be offset by a blackened background. A balancing of ageing materiality and colour is also evident in his *Automaton* (1958) between the pieces of greying wood, the white base and the emergent blue background. An intimate sense of scale to the works is also of key inspiration, as in *Space Object Box: "Little Bear, etc." motif* (mid-1950s–early 1960s), where the sculptural vessel form is not much larger than a shoe box.

Donald Judd: (American, 1928-1994)

Donald Judd may offer perhaps the most formal and uncompromising adoption of the vessel form in his commonly labelled "minimalist" sculptures. At opposite ends to Rauschenberg's approach, where the artist's hand is clearly evident in the scavenged items and roughly crafted or found vessel forms, Judd would approach his works with "a goal to rid art of the Abstract Expressionists' reliance on the self-referential trace of the painter, in order to form pieces that were free from emotion" (The Art Organisation 2012). In order to achieve this, Judd embraces industrialised processes and machine-made materials as a way of avoiding the evidence of his own hand in the making process.

Fig.26

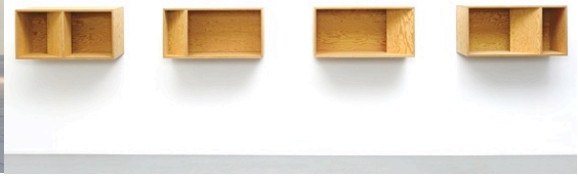


Fig.27

While this approach may seem to sidestep a seemingly critical requirement for the viewer to be able to engage with the work, through the artist's avoidance of displaying the expressive mark of their own hand, the opposite is in fact true. By distilling planes and structural elements to a point where the reflections and play of

light on the surfaces of the vessels become the focus, moving in relation to the viewer's movements, a direct and powerful connection is established.

The National Gallery of Victoria notes of Judd's *Untitled (6 boxes)*,1974, that, "People find themselves reflected in the mirror-like finishes, so that they become part of the work [and] as they walk around it, their legs and feet create a drama of their own" (NGA 2010). Judd's approach, then, is to create work which moves a viewer, not by epitomising or responding to a particular personal emotion or meaning, but rather by allowing the viewer to bring their own emotion to the work and then to reflect upon it.

This idea of leaving the meaning of the work somewhat ambiguous is one which definitely interests me, given the aim of responding to the mystery and awe experienced in the landscape. While the more formal aspects of his work, including the light and shadow play, repetition of form, and use of materiality, are influential to my approach, it is actually the way in which the work asks more questions of the viewer than it answers which is fascinating to me as a means of eliciting a sense of mystery. There is no text integrated in the work to explain its meaning. No iconography or illustration is present to clarify the work's intent. By avoiding a representational approach to his sculpture, Judd's adoption of the vessel form in such a minimal way leaves a resounding impression and influence in the context of this project.

Moving from an intimately or human-scaled scaled artwork or object in the examples of Judd, Rauschenberg, Cornell and Wright to a human-scaled architecture in the work of Peter Zumthor, the vessel form has been explored in contemporary creative practice across scales and creative disciplines as a means of providing insight and influence for the studio-based research.

Peter Zumthor: (Swiss, 1943-)
Bruder Klaus Field Chapel, Germany.

Rather than a consecrated place of worship for religious services, the Bruder Klaus chapel in Wachendorf, Germany, was designed as "a place for personal meditation" dedicated to the Swiss "mystic" Brother Klaus (Zumthor 2014, p. 122).

Visiting the Bruder Klaus chapel requires a pilgrimage. The nearest large city is Cologne. From there, in Germany's West, a coach ride and then a bus deliver visitors, after an hour of travelling, to the small regional village of Wachendorf. The last part of the journey is made on foot, walking the fifteen or so minutes through the rolling fields, listening to the sounds of bees weaving between poppies at the edge of the swaying crops.

Fig.28

Arriving at the chapel, a triangular metal door signals the entry, alongside an integrated bench that welcomes travellers to rest. Pivoting the entry door aside, a narrowing interior space curves away from the entry, lowering in height and delving into shadow. In the process, the sounds of the local insect life and the breeze working on the fields outside is muffled and muted in the chapel's entry space. Light levels are reduced with the help of the enclosing ash-blacked concrete walls, the scent of burnt wood still hovering from the remnant logs burnt away after the concrete was poured and set. The crunch and grip of gravel underfoot outside is

replaced with the soft brushing and slide of soles on the once molten, now smoothed and cooled lead floor. And just as the eyes are adjusting to the darkness of the entry, an indescribable well of light opens up to the sky, returning the sounds of insects in the fields and the shifting light and shadows from the movement of cloud forms above.

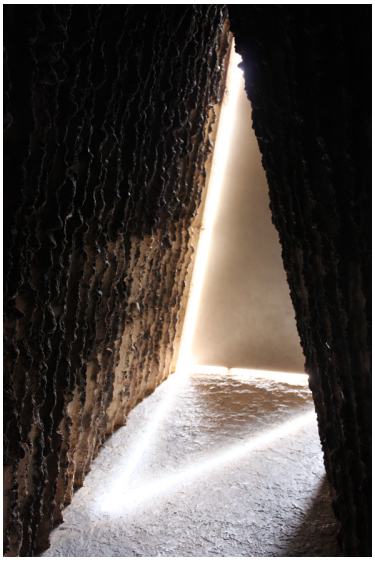


Fig.29

Fig.30

As if to bring the day into contrast with the night, the blackened walls in this space are punctuated with beads of light like stars in the night sky, carried along blown glass rods, through the immobile density of concrete and the gently shifting light outside.

For me, this small building in a field typifies and defines a phenomenological understanding of spatial experience. To be in this place is to experience an environment where all of the visitor's senses have been considered. The visual aspects of light and shadow, the tactile nature of the materiality, the allusion to a sense of time, the auditory aspects of natural sound, the human sense of scale, the scents picked up by the olfactory system and the sense of mystery brought about by a deftly choreographed process of containing, concealing and revealing. In such highly tuned and instrument-like buildings, the essence of a place is embraced and celebrated through the phenomenological medium of the built form.

An exploration of the vessel form in contemporary art and creative practice has highlighted a number of successful and influential approaches to the adoption of the

vessel form as a medium for creative expression across different scales and disciplines. As a strong influence for the way in which found objects may be incorporated with the vessel form as a means of responding to place, Rauschenberg's work emphasises the power of hidden, discoverable spaces in a sculptural work to connect with a viewer by employing multiple hinging panels and compositional configurations.

The work of Joseph Cornell has provided a key influence for the intimate scale of the sculptural forms, while underlining the ability of these intimate spaces to shift the viewer in their mind's eye to a much greater concept of scale and another realm of experience.

By deliberately eschewing any obvious relation to a particular expression of meaning, and by focusing on the formal and material qualities of his sculptures, Donald Judd's work allows the viewer to bring their own understanding to the works as they walk around and consider them. This establishing of ambiguous meaning in the work has developed, in turn, as an important influence on my own studio practice.

Highlighting the ability of materiality to speak for itself about place and meaning without resorting to text or illustration, the work of Damien Wright has also strengthened my understanding of a potential approach to the sculptural device of the vessel form. Shifting from the small scale to the large, the vessel forms intrinsic to the architecture of Peter Zumthor have left a lasting impression and an important influence on my understanding of a phenomenological approach to embodied spatial experience. Given the intention of translating the sense of place experienced in the landscape across scales from the macro-scale to the micro-scale, Zumthor's approach to design has provided a valuable and relevant multi-sensory understanding of spatial experience in architecture. Discussed in detail in the following chapter, this understanding has also provided a major part of the foundation for my studio-based methodology.

Chapter 3

Methodology:

The beginning of my studio practice involves visiting and dwelling in natural landscapes. After sketching details and making photographic observations of the atmosphere in these places, there is then a return to the studio to begin development of the work. The first marks in my studio process are made on paper. These sketches often come quickly and very much intuitively, starting as small, scratchy line drawings, which might simply suggest an overall approach or direction to the form of the work. From these sketches, models of the early vessel forms are made and tested in different scales and lighting conditions before fabrication of the final forms is undertaken.

The methodology of this process has, in turn, been underpinned by the themes which emerged as part of the literature review, including distilling a sense of place, traces of place and collecting, spatial experience and phenomenon and its highlighted contributing themes of materiality, time, light, shadow and scale.

While each of the studio works has embraced to a varying extent the full range of themes which emerged throughout the literature review, each of the selected landscapes has also prompted a particular focus on one or two of these themes, given the nature of the selected landscape and the specific way in which a sense of mystery, awe or reverence has been experienced there. The way in which these themes have underpinned the studio methodology for the research in each of these locations forms the basis of the discussion for this chapter.

Mt Lyell

Fig.31

In the case of *Mt Lyell*, the first work to be developed as part of the research project, before any site visits were able to be made, the place in question had not been visited in some ten years. Perhaps an outlier in the series of sculptural works for just this reason, the response to Mt Lyell was drawn instead from a powerful, self-sustaining and distilled memory of the mysterious landscape as it was experienced on my first visit to Tasmania several years before.

In returning to and reflecting upon the sense of place in my mind during those early stages of the research, it was the distilled image of the cleared and barren hilltops, devoid of vegetation, which returned again and again to my mind's eye – the disturbing consequence of historical mining processes and practices on the land.

This recurring image of a denuded landscape prompted the referencing of the bald mountainous form in *Mt Lyell*. Materially, the exterior of the vessel form here is smooth, black-stained Tasmanian oak – a human-altered finish on a local Tasmanian timber, intuitively referencing the stripped-back surface of the mountain. Internally, a hidden drawer, rich and orange-red in colour and reflective when drawn into the light, is made from highly-figured blackwood and takes its cue from the exposed and reddened landscape surrounding the mountain. In a conceptual reference to the processes involved in the mining of the earth and the gnawing at the land, the inner drawer's form is also stepped and toothed, suggesting an archetypal sense of mining machinery.

Shrouded in darkness, except for the defining reflections across the vessel form's ridgeline and in the shifting light reflected by the grain of the blackwood interior, this work also embraces the ability of both light and shadow to evoke a sense of mystery and reverence.

Fig.32

The memory of being captivated by the barren hilltops of Mt Lyell and its surrounds has been a profound and enduring one. In order to respond, then, to this mysterious landscape with its ability to captivate, the vessel form of *Mt Lyell* was also strongly influenced by the meditative tray stones or "bonseki" discussed in Chapter 1. Elevated above its display surface and intimate in scale, the work aims to provide a focal point for reflection while embodying a sense of the macrocosm of landscape in the microcosm of the sculptural vessel form.

Fortescue Bay

Fig.33

Away from the crashing and lapping waves of the foreshore, the feeling at Fortescue Bay across the seasons is one of discovery and revelation. High up on the backshore of the littoral zone, just before the dunes, smatterings of objects washed up at high tide become great tangles of skeletal branches and twisting, blackened kelp. Even when the sun is hidden behind the clouds, the contrast between these mysteriously darkened objects thrown up by the sea and the silica-rich sand is a thing of quiet and startling beauty.

Given the powerful sense of place brought about by these transient natural objects and the intuitive desire to share the sense of reverence felt for them, the collected traces of landscape and containment, concealment and revelation became the key methodological drivers behind the sculptural responses to this place. In order to respond to the sense of reverence experienced in Fortescue Bay, I explored a number of approaches.

In the first of the responses to this landscape, *Fortescue Bay (i)*, the viewer is presented with a blackened steel plate upon which a desiccated kelp holdfast is nested at one end. Moving closer to the object, the viewer's gaze is guided to the delicacy and intricate detail of the light brown holdfast, sitting in stark contrast to the blackened steel of the vessel's exterior. Once the steel plate is recognised as a hinged panel, it can be lifted. This allows the interior of the form to be flooded with light,

highlighting a sun-bleached and silvered piece of driftwood resting on a bed of shimmering white beach sand, both framed by the blackened steel walls of the vessel form. The powerful sense of reverence experienced in the landscape at Fortescue Bay is translated here through the experience of discovering the traces of landscape, one partially contained and one completely hidden before the surprise experienced by its revelation.

Fig.34

Fig.35

Amongst this tangle of discarded natural objects, high up on the beach was another weathered-smooth and twisting piece of driftwood, evoking the form of a seahorse or the skeleton of an unknown reef-dwelling fish. Light and brittle, the inherent beauty of the object seemed to deserve honouring in much the same way that the icons of saints have been revered in the reliquaries of the past. Fascinated with its minute natural details imbued with a sense of aura and place and, with the aim of heightening this sense in the work, here, my intent is to treat the collected trace of the landscape as if it were a charmed icon or relic. In the closed position, the viewer is presented with a mysterious black container mounted on a wall. Upon closer inspection, however, a hinged or sliding panel is discovered – upon opening, the viewer is surprised by the clear shaft of light falling down onto the driftwood suspended inside. With the aim of heightening this sense of awe, an additional steel panel at the top of the vessel can be lifted, further enshrining the driftwood while washing its golden backdrop in light.

Fig.36

Just as Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* has described the way in which closer inspection of a periwinkle might "increase the object's stature(Bachelard & Jolas 1994, p. 155) the aim here is for the viewer to experience a revelation of micro-detail in the delicate driftwood and that, as Bachelard puts it, "even cubic dimensions have no more meaning, for the reason that a new dimension – the dimension of intimacy – has just opened up" (p. 85).

As a means of providing multiple compositions of containment, concealment and revelation in the one work, while establishing a sense of anticipation, discovery and revelation for the viewer, *Fortescue Bay (ii)* represents an important step in the research, and is strongly influenced by the work of both Rauschenberg and Tanizaki.

With the hope of avoiding any potential allusions to specific aesthetic styles, cultures, religions or periods in history, while responding to the sense of timelessness in the landscape, the steel form nesting the kelp holdfast in *Fortescue Bay (i)*, *Fortescue Bay (iii)* and *Fortescue Bay (iv)* takes its cues from the pure geometries of the circle and the square. Existing as symbols across numerous cultures and religions over time – including Buddhism, Hinduism, Mesoamerican civilizations, Christianity and even Western psychological interpretations (Jung et al. 2011, pp. 195-196) – the circle has often represented the heavens and the square the earth, while together, the two form a microcosm of the universe (Merriam-Webster 2018). The intention, then, of using the geometry of the circle in the square to frame the traces of place is to provide the viewer with the sense of a sort of stripped-back and timeless mandala or "support for the meditating person" (Hansen 2012).

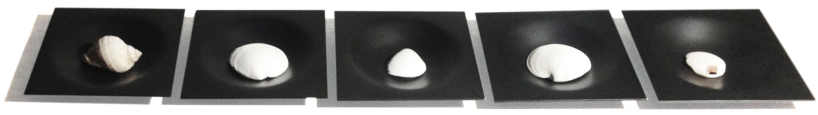


Fig.37

Fig.38

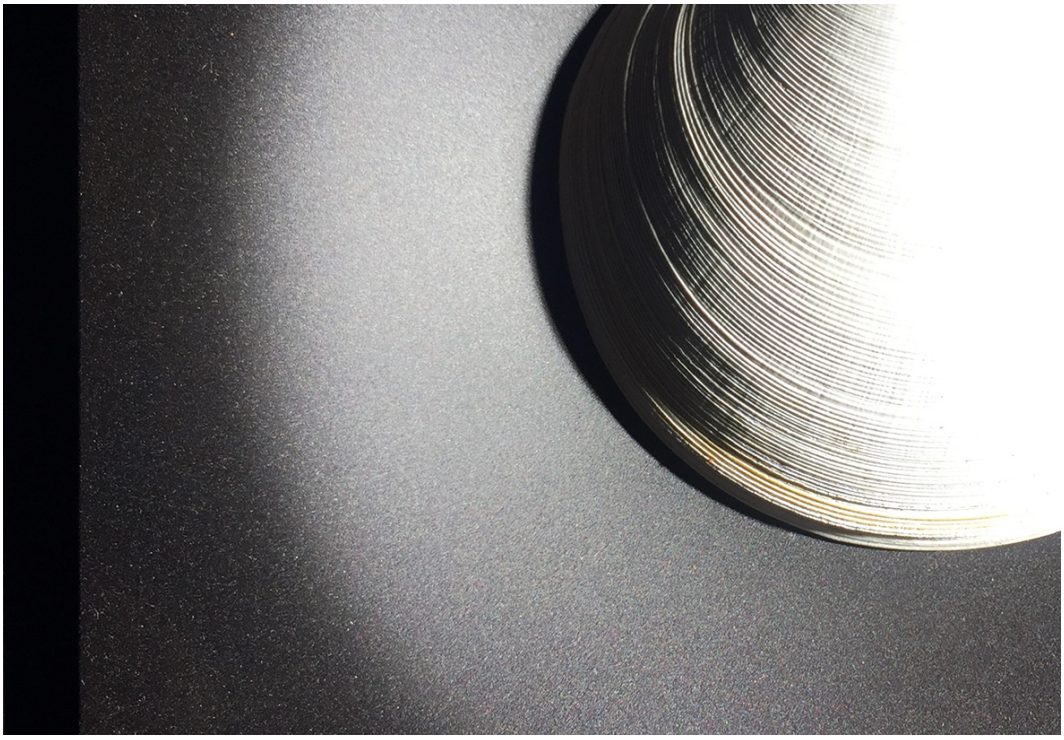


Fig.39

Canoe Bay

Fig.40

In visiting all of the selected landscapes, a clear sense of both time and timelessness is evident. The sense of mystery and resulting aura of these places is in part derived from the tension between these two perceived timescales. With the hope of responding to this "temporal tension" in the landscape and the sense of mystery and reverence that it helps bring about, my work considers contrasting materiality, weathering and the repeated form as an attempted phenomenological and sculptural response to time. While shared as a recurring theme by all of the responses to place, the theme of scale is also a powerful influence for the way in which the sculptural responses to Canoe Bay have evolved.

Perhaps more than the other selected sites, Canoe Bay elicits an incredible sense of wonder through the strength of its inherent material contrasts and the way that those materials speak of a mysterious sense of both immediate and deep time. Two of the strongest images when arriving at Canoe Bay are the orange rusting hulk of the scuttled hopper barge against the grey blue water body surrounding it, and the bulbous tumble of smooth grey rocks along the shore, interspersed with tall pockets of dry grass, gently ruffled by the breeze. Taking its material cue from the rusting barge, the repeated vessel form in *Canoe Bay (ii)* provides the basis for part of the work's temporal response. Once welded and filed, the mottled variation in rust and colour is achieved by spraying the forms with salt water from the bay over a series of days. Like the barge, these vessels will continue to change, rusting

Fig.41

and discolouring, darkening and chipping over time. In order to highlight this sense of decay, the mild steel base plate of this work is intended to retain its mill finish. Gently reflective, mottled and blue-grey, this plate references the water body surrounding the barge, while providing a cold, hard, machine-like backdrop to the natural beauty of the traces of stone and grass from the landscape.

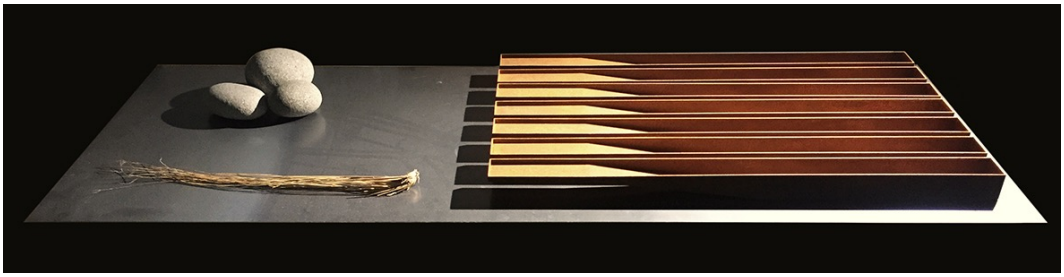


Fig.42

Canoe Bay (ii) embraces a response to the sense of "temporal tension" in the landscape in two ways. The first of these is through the contrasting of materials. The stones are suggestive of a deep, geological timescale and the phenomenally slow processes of tumbling and eroding, while the rusted vessel forms refer to a much more recent timescale, quick to break down in the elements. Time here can also be interpreted in the repetition of the rusted vessel forms. Brought about by the powerful image of the scuttled barge returning and recurring in my reflections on Canoe Bay, so, in turn, the repeated forms may suggest in themselves a temporality and the passing of time.

Fig.43

Fig.44

As with all of the sculptural responses to place, the development of *Canoe Bay (i)* was guided in large part by the theme of scale. From early sketches, to models and the final fabricated forms, thinking about scale in terms of how a person would relate to the translated sense of the landscape was incredibly important.

In order to connect with the spaces in and around the objects, I have tried to ensure that the experience of each form is very much a personal one, experienced at an intimate scale. *For Canoe Bay (i)* this means a size not much wider than a person's shoulders and only as deep as is needed to bend slightly and explore the interior space in detail. The height, too, of the plinths which support three of the key works, *Mt Lyell, Fortescue Bay (i)* and *Canoe Bay (i)*, set the vessel forms at elbow height, as if they have been placed as an offering on some form of altar, easy to place and take away with ease.

Cape Hauy

Through the process of this research, the clarity of light and mysterious shadows of the Tasmanian landscape have become a constant source of fascination. The hollow tree trunks of Cape Hauy, silver-grey outside and inky black internally, suggest an unknown time in history, ravaged by fire. In the absence of light, shadow inevitably develops here along with an ambiguity of detail and depth. As established by Tanizaki, this ambiguity also serves to heighten a sense of mystery and intrigue.

Given the incredible detail afforded by the Tasmanian light and also the powerful sense of mystery found in the shadows of the visited landscapes, balancing the "clarity" offered by light with the ambiguity and mystery brought about in shadow forms a strong part of the studio process behind these sculptural responses to place.

Fig.45

Cape Hauy (i) was my first attempt to balance the clarity of light in the landscape with the mystery of the deep shadows found in those burnt-out trees on the walk to Cape Hauy. Responding to the deep blackened voids, the vessel form in this case is open to the viewer at first sight. As a long, parallel pair of horizontal Tasmanian oak shelves joined by a vertical oak backing, the vessel form here serves to contain a deep shadow. By charring the inner surface of the form to a dull, matt black, light does not find a surface here from which it can be reflected. In an attempt to accentuate this shadow, the natural blond oak exterior of the outer surface is finished to make it both catch and reflect the light. To highlight the trace of the landscape within, a small circular oculus is cut from one end of the upper shelf, allowing for a shaft of light to pierce the shadow and reveal the detail and beauty of the natural form tucked inside the containing circle of light.

Fig.46

With the aim of building upon this contrasting nature of shadow and light in the landscape, *Cape Hauy (ii)* embraces another blackened and hollow void, while allowing the light to reveal the trace of the landscape within. With an exterior of reflective, French polished blackwood, the vessel form's exterior attracts the gaze of the viewer under the light and, as they move towards and around it, the light shifts as it is reflected from the densely packed wood grain within. Taking cues from the work of Donald Judd, this shifting of the reflections and light play on the vessel's surface aim to provide the viewer with a sense that their presence and movement is integral to the experience of the object, before it compels them to move closer to investigate.

Fig.47

Coupled with the sense of surprise afforded by the sliding panels at the top and front of the vessel form, light is embraced here as a means of bringing into focus the beautiful and delicate detail of the silvery driftwood against a backdrop of deep shadow. By providing this combination of anticipation, surprise, light and shadow, the aim here is to translate a sense of the mysterious light and shadow experienced in the landscape through the vessel form, while the viewer's focus is brought inside the vessel sculpture to a point where their perception of scale also begins to shift towards the immense.

This chapter has highlighted the way in which my studio practice has been influenced and underpinned by the themes which emerged throughout the literature review. While all of the vessel forms have in some way been influenced by these themes, each of the sculptural responses to the selected landscapes has provided particularly strong examples of certain themes' adoption through the studio practice. *Mt Lyell* has shown the way in which a distilled image or sense of place might influence the approach to a work. The vessel forms made in response to Fortescue Bay have provided insight into the way that traces of place and collections might be integrated with the vessel form in various configurations of containment, concealment and revelation, in order to heighten the sense of aura experienced in the environment. Investigations in the studio of sculptural vessel forms which respond to the sense of tension between timescales in the landscape have resulted in works displaying significant contrasts in materiality. Through the vessel forms responding to Cape Hauy, a means by which to honour the light and mysterious shadows in the landscape has been explored.

In addition to the themes which have been explored through the studio-based practice, the final chapter aims to highlight a series of conclusions which might be drawn from the project, while suggesting a potential way forward for future research into the vessel form as a sculptural response to place.

Conclusion

This studio-based investigation has been directly informed by four Tasmanian landscapes: Mt Lyell, Fortescue Bay, Canoe Bay and Cape Hauy.

With a view to responding to and capturing the sense of mystery and reverence experienced in the selected environments, the studio-based research sought to establish a series of sculptural vessel forms which integrate traces of the landscape and are underpinned by a phenomenological understanding of embodied spatial experience.

Through a literature review, two contextual themes have emerged: "The Vessel Form in Context," which considers historical precedents of the vessel form's use in creative expression; and "The Vessel Form in Contemporary Art and Creative Practice" which explores influential and contemporary works by artists Robert Rauschenberg, Joseph Cornell and Donald Judd, craftsman Damien Wright and architect Peter Zumthor. These themes and precedents have provided the historical and stylistic context for the project within the field of the visual arts and abstracted sculptural responses to landscape.

Combined with studio-based exploration, four core themes have developed which reflect and support the investigation's central question of how the vessel form might act as a sculptural device for reflection on the sense of reverence and mystery experienced in Tasmanian landscapes. Together with "Distilling a Sense of Place", "Traces of Place and Collecting" and "Containment / Concealment / Revelation", the theme of "Spatial Experience as Phenomenon" has provided a deepened phenomenological understanding of materiality, time, light, shadow and scale that has evolved through the research into a methodology for the studio-based practice.

Given time to reflect upon the studio outcomes, I feel as though a phenomenological understanding of embodied spatial experience and the integration of traces of the landscape *can* underpin and inform the sculptural translation of a personal response to the larger, macro-scale environment to a much

more intimate and private micro-scale environment. The success of the studio-based research however, has been largely determined by installing the sculptural forms for display in a gallery space with an appropriate approach to lighting. Given the sense of discovery that I experienced when first arriving at the selected landscapes, my intention is that a sense of discovery has also been established within the gallery setting through the integration of translucent screening devices and a gradual discovery process in experiencing each of the works.

In addition to the layout, the elements which have truly activated the contrasts in the materiality, scale and form of the works are the deep variations of light and shadow. Drawing from the sharp contrasts of illumination in the selected environments, each of the works embraces a need for this same contrast in order to be experienced as intended. By shrouding the traces of landscape within in a glow of light against the darkness, my intention has been to establish a series of narrow, crisp beams of light to graze the surfaces and interiors of the vessel forms on display.

In responding to these natural locations which prompt awe and wonder, mystery and fascination, the collected traces of landscape have become in a sense "charmed" relics, taking on an aura that is intrinsically linked to place. For example, the weathered driftwood integrated into the pieces does not represent death or things passed but captures a moment in time in relation to the site of origin. Lighting, weather, and the experience of the site are captured and sealed in the sculptural form.

Landscape and human agency have emerged as undercurrents to the work. As may well be assumed, none of the selected locations for the research is entirely "natural" or "untouched". While only very subtle in some locations, the contemporary traces of human's effects on each of the locations are evident: the winding path, the scuttled barge, a sound from a distant boat ramp, the ravaged mine site, the twisted rope found at the high tide line. Beyond this contemporary evidence of human agency, further research would also without doubt uncover the myriad ways in which indigenous peoples had also helped to shape these respective landscapes over some 40,000 years through seasonal patterns of movement, hunting, fishing,

farming and gathering. Despite visiting these places in the hope of finding a pure and natural escape, each one of these places has been touched in its own way by human agency, and this contrast is very much present in the final vessel forms.

Another consideration is the vessel form as both a specific and universal response. If you were to take away the place names from these sculptural vessel forms - be it an indigenous or for that matter colonial name - their materiality, use of light and shadow and the integration of traces of the landscape would still allude to a sense of Tasmanian landscape, though perhaps not necessarily a specific location. Given the air of mystery, intrigue, the unknown or the fleeting in these visited landscapes, I feel as though a response which prompts mostly questions is still a response which honours the original intent of the research, and perhaps alludes then in each of the responses to a "universal" truth as much as one grounded in a response to specific Tasmanian landscapes.

During the evolution of my studio practice, a series of archetypes has emerged. Notably, the circle in the square, the elongated horizontal void, the plinth / "altar" and, during the studio investigation, the shelf / "altar". Several shelves were used in the studio space to organise, store, view and review the works in progress. Traces of the landscape would be arranged neatly next to or within study models of card and balsa, largely at eye height in order to distill over time the best approach to a composition and its lighting. In turn, these shelves became like altars to the found objects and their containers. The plinth forms which have developed through the research have also taken on the sense of the altar. Arranged to display three of the vessel forms at elbow height while standing, these platforms act as framing devices for the works while also relating to a human scale and the sense of an offering place, heightening the sense of aura attached to each response.

Fig.48

Many of the forms which have emerged in the work have adopted long, low-lying compositions, establishing a kind of landscape-void, balanced and stable. The universal form of the circle in the square has also become a key compositional device, relating to the earth (the square) and the circle (the universe). The intuitive adoption of this form relates both to the minute detail nested within the form and the relationship that the nested trace has to the wider environment.

The spatial containment inherent to the vessel forms has also developed over the course of the research. The main evolution in this sense involved a shift from completely enclosed space, requiring access through a device such as a door or sliding panel – see *Mt Lyell*, *Cape Hauy (ii)*, *Fortescue Bay (i)*, *Fortescue Bay (ii)*) – to a spatial approach which could be left open at all times or which might only be enclosed by the suggestion of a boundary or enclosure; for example, the steel plate base of *Canoe Bay (ii)* and open dished plates of *Fortescue Bay (iii)* and *Fortescue Bay (iv)*. While this has been a natural progression in the work, this shift requires a reliance upon very specific lighting conditions or the clever locating of walls or partitions in a gallery sense in order to create the "concealment" and "revelation" aspects of the work. An opportunity for further research, then, would be to

investigate a sculptural response to place and spatial containment which does not rely upon particular lighting conditions or spatial layouts in order to offer a sense of place.

In the early stages of the project I had also hoped that these vessel forms would be interacted with by the general public. However, in the course of the research and with the idea in mind that these objects would be displayed in a potentially un-surveyed public space, this idea was rejected in favour of a response which would not necessarily be opened, touched or operated by anyone other than an owner or invigilator. While this decision allowed the sculptural responses to embrace a delicacy of form that they might not otherwise have been able to express, an approach which intends the general public to interact with the vessel forms is worthy of further exploration.

Beyond this study and as suggested in the Project Context and Framework, a deepened understanding of indigenous ontologies contributing to a sense of place would provide fertile ground for future research. Contextualising the definition of 'place' as it relates to the ancient and continuing palawa culture of the island would provide an incredibly rich undercurrent to sculptural responses to the landscape while establishing a hugely valuable cultural resource for artistic reference into the future.

Given the themes of this project surrounding a response to and connection with landscape and the external environment, another future direction for the research would be to take the vessel form responses into exterior space – beyond the gallery setting. Instead of relying upon the artificial lighting, heating and sound conditions of a gallery space, these sculptural forms could interact with the Tasmanian elements, the sun, the wind, the sounds and the ocean's waves. This approach would no doubt offer a powerful means of offering a viewer a more direct lens through which to reflect upon the landscape of a specific place.

Another approach for future research would lie in the personalised ritual associated with the integration of one's own found objects or traces of landscape. In this way, the vessel form might become an object which allows a viewer to mediate their

own experience in the landscape. Resting empty until the viewer places an object of their own finding in the vessel form, the limits between an artistic and a design practice could, in turn, come into question. Would the work still operate as an artwork in response to place? and would it require instructions? Or would the work have moved across creative fields into the area of design? In either case, this exploration of an unknown person's integration of personal objects with a sculpted form and the process' ability to prompt or aid meditation on the landscape would be of key interest.

Given a more holistic approach to the phenomenological aspects of this study, the scent of a space, the sound of a space and temperature of a space could also be explored, perhaps in the exhibition space, interior or exterior installation of the vessel forms in order to provide different combinations and complexities of spatial interpretation in response to the landscape.

With the intent of establishing the ability of the vessel form to serve as a sculptural medium in response to place, this investigation has explored a number of largely successful approaches, while suggesting several avenues for future research into sculptural response to place.

By placing this study contextually in the field of both historical and contemporary creative practice where the vessel form has been embraced as the medium, this research offers an additional vantage point from which to consider the evolution of the medium over time. By researching sculptural responses to landscape through the lens of a phenomenological understanding of embodied spatial experience in architecture, the project has also provided important insights into creative practice across both scales and artistic disciplines.

By integrating themes of the vessel form, traces of place, a phenomenological understanding of embodied spatial experience and the distilling of a sense of the landscape, this research has resulted in a new body of sculptural work which aims to provide a small addition to the existing body of knowledge surrounding sculptural responses to place.

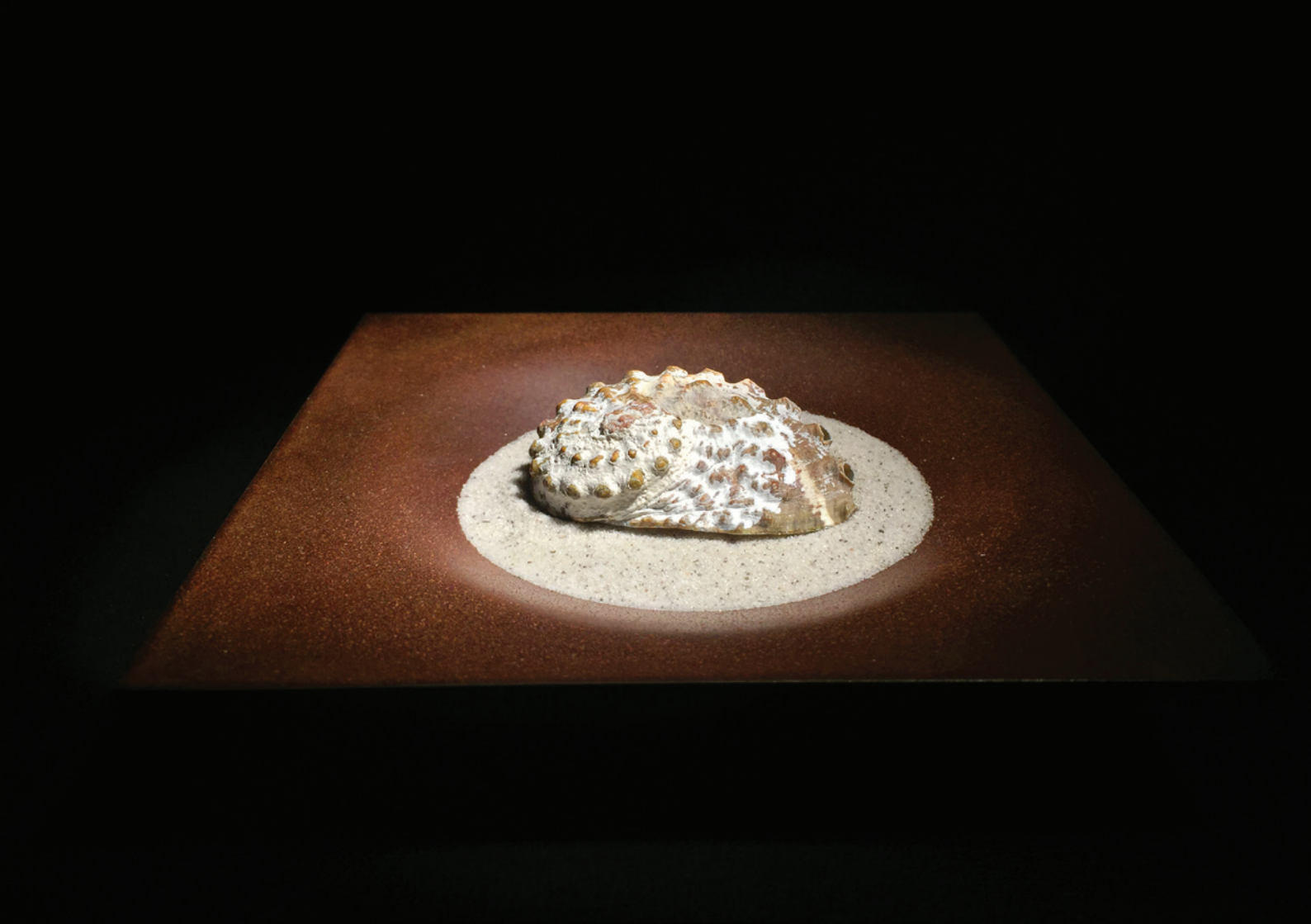
Appendix

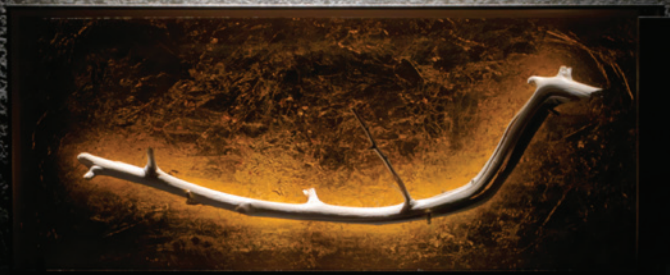
Internalised landscapes. The vessel form in sculptural response to place.

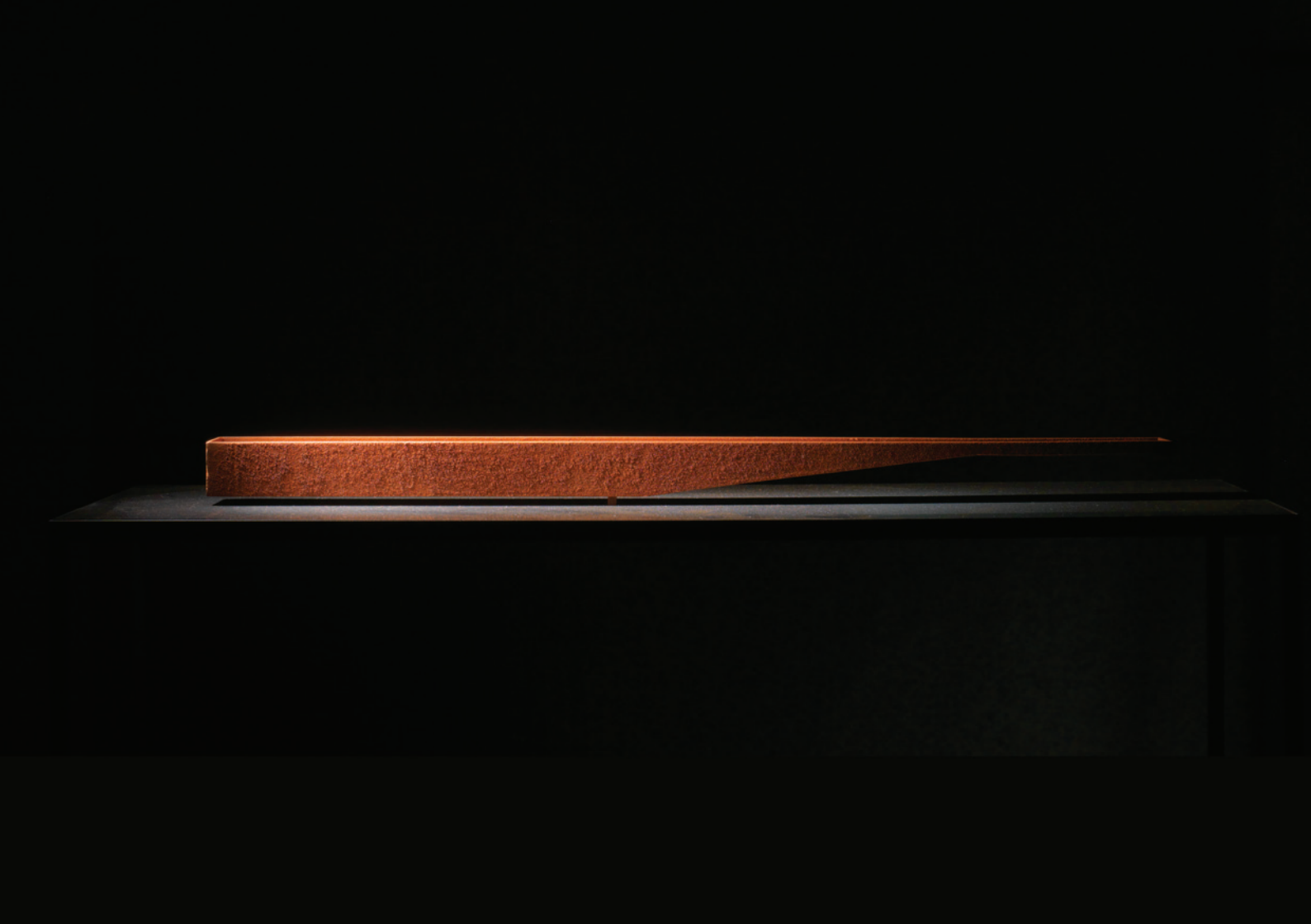
Examination exhibition documentation

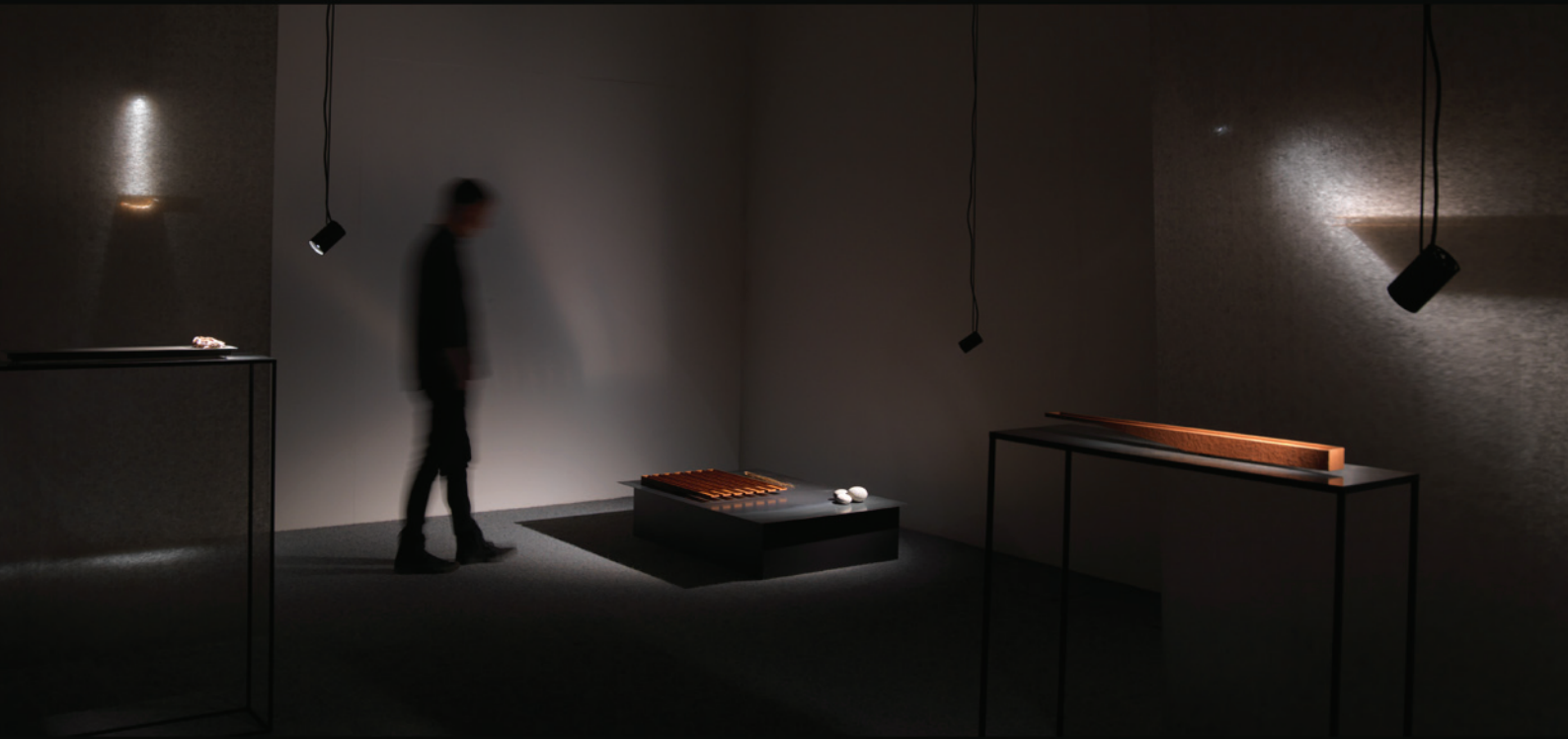
Tim Sidebottom

Internalised landscapes.
The vessel form in sculptural response to place.









1-2	*Fortescue Bay (iii)*
3-4	*Cape Hauy (i)*
5-6	*Canoe Bay (ii)*
7-9	*Fortescue Bay (ii)*
10-11	*Cape Hauy (ii)*
12-16	*Fortescue Bay (i)*
17-18	*Mt Lyell*
19-21	*Fortescue Bay (iv)*
22-24	*Canoe Bay (i)*

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